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TURN YOUR HOBBY INTO A BUSINESS...

More women than ever are setting up their own business. The desire to swap being an employee for becoming the boss, give up a lengthy commute and be based at home or build work around a family are just a few of the reasons. Whatever the driving force, these women are finding fulfilment and declaring they wish they'd done it sooner. Could you be one of them? Within this book, we give you some of their stories and the sound business advice that could inspire you to take the plunge. See *Country Living* Magazine every month for more, or join one of our Build-A-Business courses, where you can learn about everything from defining your brand to marketing and social media, get advice from experts and network with other small-business owners. And if we're not covering something you'd like to know in this edition of *Turn Your Hobby into a Business*, email us at country.living@hearst.co.uk and we shall include it in the next one.



Dorothy Smith

Editor-in-chief
Country Living Magazine



TURN YOUR HOBBY *into a* BUSINESS

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MEET COUNTRY LIVING'S TEAM OF EXPERTS

We asked the small-business gurus who helped us write this book what they would like to do for a living if they hadn't pursued their current roles...



PAULA HUTCHINGS

Using the experience she gained while working for large-scale international companies from beauty brands to beverage producers, Paula left the corporate world to set up Marketing Vision Consultancy. A qualified associate of the Chartered Institute of Marketing, she finds that running her own company enables her to balance her work life with parenthood. She now enjoys using her knowledge to provide invaluable support and advice to other small-business owners (marketingvision.co.uk).

PLAN B: *"I'd like to write children's books, and educate young people about different countries and cultures through fun, engaging storytelling with incredible illustrations that capture their imagination. I am really passionate about children learning to read (and travel), and the opportunities this opens up for them. A future project, perhaps..."*



CAROLE ANN RICE

Carole Ann coaches entrepreneurs from all over the UK and across the world. She was inspired to enter the profession after hiring a coach herself following a number of life crises and went on to train for three years, becoming a member of the International Coach Federation. Her style is to include 'humour as well as humanity' and one of her specialist areas is supporting aspiring and actual small-business owners. Carole Ann is also a journalist and writes for national newspapers and magazines, including *Country Living* (realcoachingco.com).

PLAN B: *"I'd run a small boutique hotel known for its exquisite décor and first-class service. Guests' personal favourites – drinks, wines, scented candles, flowers – would all be noted and any foibles kept on record, so that the most thoughtful service could be provided. As châteline, I'd be the most accomplished host, and a visit to my hotel would be on everyone's wish list!"*



HANNAH MARTIN

Hannah is founder of the online magazine *Talented Ladies Club* (talentedladiesclub.com), which aims to inspire and empower ambitious mothers. It is a global business with a growing readership and a strong social media network. As well as publishing daily articles, Hannah runs a monthly membership club and online courses to help women realise their business and career dreams. She is also a copywriter, a qualified psychotherapist, hypnotherapist and Neuro-linguistic Programming Practitioner (talentedladiesclub.com).

PLAN B: *"I love cooking and, if I wasn't busy running the Talented Ladies Club, I would pursue my dream of opening a beachside café serving recipes that I've picked up from my world travels."*



FIONA DAVIES

After graduating with a degree in sociology, Fiona based herself in London and worked in marketing, sales and training. It was when she joined Harper Adams University on a farm diversification project in 1999 that she became involved in the formation of Women in Rural Enterprise (WiRE). She now works as its business manager and supports hundreds of women in business across the country through its many networks (wireuk.org).

PLAN B: *"To run a fashion business with my mum, a former dress designer and manufacturer, who, in her eighties, still sews daily. We would produce a range of layered work-to-play clothing, in soft fabrics and bright colours (strictly no beige), which doesn't need ironing and flatters everyone."*

"Our family home always had a 'cutting room' with roll upon roll of fabric, industrial machines and a massive table. For me, it's not so much a Plan B – it would be more like going back to my roots!"

In the beginning...

There aren't any entry requirements to starting your own venture – you are never too old, too young, too shy or too inexperienced. You are dressed in the right clothes, have the right qualifications and you do know enough – when the time is right for you, with hard work and confidence you can unleash your inner entrepreneur

WORDS BY FIONA DAVIES

SO YOU WANT TO START A BUSINESS

You're in good company. According to the most recent parliamentary figures, in 2015 there were 5.4 million enterprises in the UK, with 5.1 million being of the micro variety. New start-ups are thriving and there has never been a better time to start a business, thanks to:

- The growing interest in local, niche or unique enterprises, and the growing band of customers that are actively looking outside the high street for products and services.
- Increased respect for small businesses, with a recognition of the major role they play in supporting the economy.
- The myriad opportunities for networking, sharing skills and finding support from like-minded people due to the fact there are thousands of new ventures starting every week.
- Today's inspirational role models: the great business owners who do it their way, eschewing traditional corporate models and creating a company that reflects their values.



WHATEVER THE
INSPIRATION FOR
STARTING YOUR
DREAM BUSINESS,
IT WILL BE JUST
THAT – YOURS

THE NEW ENTREPRENEUR

When we hear the term 'entrepreneur', we tend to think of high-tech hipsters, company growth innovators and large risk takers. But there is no typical business owner – you don't have to be a Harvard dropout or wear a suit, and you don't even need to create a new innovation, just a better way of doing something.

WHY? WELL, WHY NOT?

Launching a start-up can suit a whole host of different circumstances. You might have just left education and be starting off your career

as your own boss, turning your back on the traditional route into the world of work. Maybe you are filling in the gaps between family responsibilities to create a venture that can take off when life is less hectic. You could be following your passion after years in paid employment, or even making the most of newfound free time after family life has changed.

Aside from practical reasons, now dig a little deeper and ask yourself why. What is motivating you and what are your aims for your business? Is it a passion, a financial necessity, a cause you care about, a desire for more money or the urge for freedom and flexibility? Whatever the inspiration for starting your dream business, it will be just that – yours. You make it what you want it to be and take from it what you need; and that doesn't have to be hugely ambitious. All ideas of achievement are different, so it's unnecessary to compare your enterprise to others, just be sure that

you know what success looks like to you, and work towards that goal.

SEIZE THE DAY

You could start your business tomorrow (see the first chapter), but will you? Each enterprise is a work in progress. It is never going to be perfect; it will always be a prototype, to be improved and modified as you understand more about your item or service and your customers. Take the founders of Innocent Drinks, for example, who offered free smoothies at festivals and asked those people sampling to vote whether or not they should quit their jobs and make a living from producing the drinks (see innocentdrinks.co.uk and click on 'Us'). They let their customers drive the venture from day one, which meant starting off knowing that the product was likely to change – no matter how much they loved it. The reality is that you just have to take the leap; you will never know if your business is going to be successful if it sits waiting

for you to finish polishing it. As former US president Harry S Truman said, "Imperfect action beats perfect inaction every time".

The best enterprises are organic; living, growing, feeding off their environment and moving in line with the world around them. You need responses from customers to refine an offering, you need interactions to understand how to define your brand and you need exposure to build up a following of people who will love and recommend your items or services. If you are convinced that you're doing the right thing at the right time, you have a vision for your business and understand that your life will change immeasurably, then you are ready – so, set a launch date and stop putting it off. Simply identify an opportunity and make a plan for your product. And then – armed with the right tools, attitude, connections and resources (including the inspiration and advice from this bookazine) – just hold your nose and jump in.

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CASE STUDY: IT'S NEVER TOO LATE

Fresh out of art school and with a driving passion, Gilly Page almost started her own jewellery company. She got as far as a few exhibitions and a collection, then lost her nerve. The passion stayed with her for 20 years, though, through sales jobs, raising children, account management and school classroom roles. The time was just never right. Then redundancy hit and it was a now-or-never moment. With more confidence and a firm idea of what she wanted to accomplish, she set up Gilly Page Jewellery (etsy.com/uk/shop/GillyPageJewellery), fuelled by the ideas and passion that were two decades in the making.



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MAKING THE
LEAP FROM
hobby
TO
small
business



Making the leap from hobby to small business

By choosing a venture that fits around your current commitments, your dream could soon become a reality

WORDS BY FIONA DAVIES

According to StartUp Britain, 608,110 new companies were founded in 2015; more than one a minute, all of them driven by the desire to earn a living doing what they love. Brands from Emma Bridgewater to Ella's Kitchen not only provide inspiration but prove that the market for unique, passion-driven businesses is growing rapidly – so why shouldn't your venture be part of this new movement?

WHERE DO YOU BEGIN?

If your friends and family have been complimenting your products and requesting more, if you have sold a few items locally or if you are increasingly being asked to make bespoke items, then congratulations – you have already started. By discovering that you can create something that there is a demand for, you have made the first, and one of the hardest, steps of starting a business. These early days are a unique chance to define what your product is and understand what people want to buy.

CUSTOMERS MATTER

Naturally your friends and family will be very positive about your product, but to find out what will really sell, you must widen your research circle. Distribute your creations at the school gates or at work, say that you're thinking of going into business and ask for brutally honest feedback. Make the most of low-cost opportunities – school fairs, village events and farmers'

markets – and display a wide range of products, then watch carefully what people gravitate towards and listen to feedback. It's crucial before you scale up your production to find out what your key products are.

START SIMPLE

It's common for budding entrepreneurs to have a host of exciting ideas they want to put into action. While a

wealth of inspiration is always a good thing, trying to do too many things at once can make it harder to succeed. It's best to focus on the idea that research has shown to be most popular (and this might not be your favourite). Once this is up and running you can always add more elements as you go along.

ONE SIZE DOESN'T FIT ALL

Be honest with yourself about how much time you have to devote to your enterprise and scale your venture to fit around your other commitments. Many small businesses start on a part-time basis, making money from a hobby alongside an existing job or childcare needs. This doesn't mean it is not a successful one, it's just different; growing steadily with firm roots, waiting for when the time is right to jump into full-time action. See the mini-case studies throughout this book, which all originally launched part-time.

A part-time enterprise might be the best option for you if:

ENTERPRISING WAYS TO USE YOUR TIME

10
MINS

In addition to quizzing potential customers online, why not prepare a short survey so that you can hit the streets with a clipboard and talk to people face-to-face?

30
MINS

Be a mystery shopper. Assess the competition (either online or in-store) to gain inspiration and ideas for your own enterprise. What do you like or dislike about their offering, brand and how they market themselves?

60
MINS

Begin to get familiar with the idea of a business plan and it will be less daunting when you come to write one. For advice on this topic, see the next chapter.

*Take advantage of
low-cost opportunities
– school fairs, village
events and farmers'
markets – and display a
wide range of products,
then watch what people
gravitate towards*

- You need a steady income
- You can't take on additional financial risks
- You have many other commitments
- You want to avoid the stress involved in launching full-time and would prefer to dip a toe in the water, building your business slowly

Sometimes quitting the 'day job' and launching full-time from the beginning is the only way to go. Many people who have started their own business in this way describe it as the best thing they've ever done, as you will see in many of the case studies included in this book. Be aware, though, that this will be a life-changing experience; the hours are long, the rewards hard to come by and you'll be working for the toughest boss ever!

You are probably ready to launch it full-time if these statements are true:

- You are chomping at the bit for a challenge and are ready to do something that will shake up your lifestyle
- Your family and friends are aware of your plans and

- are ready to support you
- Your cash flow can tolerate little or no income at the start of your business
- You relish the idea of being your own boss, working alone and organising your own workflow

A CHANGING RELATIONSHIP

The hobby that you used to do simply for pleasure is about to become the centre of your business. Think about how you will still enjoy it even when under pressure. See the case study (right) for some inspiration.

SET A START DATE

It's very easy to slip into an endless circle of procrastination; polishing and perfecting your product. For a kick start, set yourself a goal and a deadline to achieve it by. It could be launching your website, committing to a stand at the local farmers' market or having a programme of events, anything that marks the beginning of the adventure you're about to embark upon.

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MAKING THE LEAP



CASE STUDY: ENJOYING YOUR PASTIME

Gillian Ussher successfully turned her love of drawing and painting into a thriving enterprise (gillianussherart.com) and now has customers around the world. But it's not been without its own challenges. Working to a tight deadline or being presented with a poor-quality reference photo can easily hinder the creative process and, occasionally, feel tortuous (at which point, it is easy to let doubt about a venture creep in). To combat the loss of passion for her job, Gillian now paints something of her choosing in the evenings. Freedom to do so without instructions or limits is uplifting and a release, and has rekindled her enthusiasm for art.

THE DRESSMAKER

WOMAN OF THE CLOTH



Combining her life-long love of dressmaking and vintage style, a former City worker turned her talent for sewing and design into turnover, producing covetable collections from her home on the Isle of Wight

WORDS BY ALI HEATH • PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALUN CALLENDER



Enter Marianne Cheung's home on the west side of the Isle of Wight and you are likely to hear the calming whirr of her sewing machine from the upstairs studio. With views out across Tennyson Down and the Solent beyond, her workroom – fitted with large windows adjacent to her worktable – is light and peaceful. “I often feel as if I am outside when I’m working,” she says. “I can see the clouds, hear the wind in the trees and watch the changing seascape. The light here is mesmerising – it is a great space to be in.”

The walls are dressed with a mix of original vintage clothing designs set among Marianne's own fashion creations. Tables and shelves are piled high with bolts of fabric, treasured heirlooms and layers of curios, buttons, hooks, ribbons, trims, patterns, sewing boxes and pincushions – either inherited from her family or lovingly collected and curated over many years.

This passion for dressmaking has been part of her life for as long as she can remember. When her mother was young, Marianne's grandparents bought an old manor house in Shropshire and converted the buildings into a home and business. Her parents eventually took over and she grew up on the estate surrounded by a large, extended family. “My grandparents began a cottage





industry making soft toys in their workshop and I spent hours with them, learning how to cut and sew,” she says. “They loved to entertain and hosted many balls and parties. My grandmother’s evening dresses were all beautiful and reminiscent of Hollywood glamour, so I was forever dressing up in gowns and creating my own outfits.”

Marianne’s first sewing machine, when she was six, was a Singer, with a wheel turned by hand. She progressed onto a machine with a foot pedal and then, aged ten, an electric one. Throughout her teens, she made her own clothes and designed collections for school projects. For many years, fashion and sewing were hobbies, further developed by a fervour for thrift items: “I fell in love with vintage clothes and retro styling long before they were embraced by the fashion industry.”

Never dreaming that she could make a living from her passion, Marianne went to work in the City, which seems a far cry from her life today. “My family were very traditional,” she says. “My mother was English and my father Chinese. It was the late Eighties when I studied economics at university and there was always an expectation that I would go into a

high-powered job. Creative industries didn’t exist then in the way they do now and people certainly didn’t work at home or sell via the internet. When I began my finance career, it was all about brands and power dressing,” Marianne continued to sew, but worked on pieces for her home: “I would regularly go to the Laura Ashley factory shop in Wales and buy fabric to make bedspreads, curtains and frilly pillowcases.”

WORKING FROM HOME

Having met her husband in London, they decided 20 years ago to move to the Isle of Wight, where he had grown up, in order to start a family. “We both adored watersports and wanted our children to experience the same fun,” Marianne says. Tragically, her husband died six years ago and Marianne had to juggle life on her own with Eddie, 13, and Jamie, ten. Having enjoyed time off when the boys were younger, she decided to revisit her love of dressmaking and started her own business, Hubba Hubba Vintage. Born out of a desire to return to work while doing something she loved from home, it was initially fairly low key. Then, in 2014, Marianne re-launched her website, [Hubba Hubba Vintage](#)



"I FELL IN LOVE WITH
RETRO STYLING LONG
BEFORE IT WAS
EMBRACED BY THE
FASHION INDUSTRY"





"I WANTED THE BRAND
TO FEEL ELEGANT AND
SOPHISTICATED,
NOT TONGUE-IN-CHEEK
VINTAGE"



embraced social media and began advertising in magazines. With the children a little older, the time felt right to devote more energy to her venture. She now runs the entire operation, from designing and sewing to marketing and administration: "Vintage fashion was suddenly in vogue again and I felt that I could successfully target customers online." She designed a collection of dresses that she loved, using old patterns and reference material from books and films, all inspired by Hollywood film stars from the 1940s, 50s and 60s. "Most pieces are an amalgamation of designs woven together to create something unique. I make my own patterns out of calico, model the design in my size on one of my tailor dummies, then take it all apart and send it off to be graded into standard dress sizes," Marianne says.

TAKING CONTROL

Choosing to invest in professional photography, she used a local company to design her website: "I wanted the brand to feel classically elegant and sophisticated, not tongue-in-cheek vintage. Now I can constantly update my site and control how it all looks." Customers are typically in their late twenties upwards and are

buying a special piece for a party or event. Lots of designs are made for people who can't find off-the-shelf sizing. Fabrics are new but similar in feel to those of the original designs – apart from the silks, they are all sourced in the UK. Fittings are done remotely, customers simply send their measurements and garments are tailored with personal tweaks. "They appreciate the one-to-one contact and exclusivity," Marianne says.

With 23 designs and more to come, business is booming and designs are commissioned globally, many the result of word-of-mouth recommendations. She has also created a new collection of silk separates under the label Star & Sea, which is made in the UK.

"Taking the step from making items myself to outsourcing is very exciting and I am thrilled that I can say my products are all fairly made," Marianne continues. "Life has changed hugely for me but I love that so much creativity and knowledge has been passed down through the generations to enable this to happen."

i For more information, see hubbahubbavintage.co.uk. Prices for Marianne's designs start at £75.



Q&A

MARIANNE CHEUNG, HUBBA HUBBA VINTAGE

What do you wish you'd known before starting out?

When I first launched my business, I wasn't very internet savvy, so didn't expect the massive change in shopping habits as mobile technology developed. As a result, I had my website rebuilt, which was an unexpected cost. I now ensure I keep up to date with technological predictions.

Would you recommend any organisations to help get an idea off the ground?

I suggest contacting your local Chamber of Commerce to see if there are any start-up courses. Also, visit gov.uk and search 'Start Your Own Business' for great advice.

What made you think your business idea had potential?

The research I did showed that there was a market for my collection, and vintage fashion was becoming more en vogue. Being able to sell online was critical as I could set up my business as a purely e-commerce model at a fraction of the cost of running a retail premises.

Where do you get your inspiration?

I love seeing what people are wearing and 'liking' (through social media) in different countries; the industry is leaning towards ethical and slow fashion as an alternative to mass-produced high-street clothing.



"IF YOU CAN LEARN
SKILLS YOURSELF,
YOU'LL SPEND LESS
ON OUTSOURCING
TASKS WHILE YOU'RE
SETTING UP"

What role does social media play in your business?

Staying updated and connected is really valuable, as working from home can often be isolating. I use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest to speak directly with my customers all over the world, and discover other similar businesses and people in the fashion community.

Your biggest challenge?

Finding balance. I'm a single parent and school holidays can be tricky as I make all the garments. Being able to outsource manufacturing for my new label will make a huge

difference to us. However, I can still go to my beach hut in the summer with my iPad and work in between ice-cream runs and paddleboarding.

How do you overcome difficulties?

I take counsel from my friends and try to step back from the issue – there is always a solution. I think it's important to accept that sometimes things will go wrong.

Did your feelings about your hobby change when it turned into a business?

It took a while to adjust to the deadlines – which don't really exist when you are creating just for the love and fun of it – but I am used to that now.

Did you use any basic budgeting techniques?

I keep all my transactions filed and up to date and use a simple spreadsheet for my budgeting and cashflow. Doing this makes the money side much more manageable.

What's your proudest moment so far?

Every time a customer tells me how pleased she is with her dress.

Do you have any advice for others just starting out?

If you can learn skills yourself, you'll spend less on outsourcing tasks while setting up. When your budget is tight, watching online photography tutorials can help you take images just to get going.

Becoming a fashion designer

There is renewed interest in original clothing – a growing number of people are turning their backs on cheap, disposable garments and choosing timeless, high-quality items made by artisans to last. Whether you're creating your own designs or adapting vintage styles, here's how to get started



WORDS BY FIONA DAVIES BUSINESS MANAGER, WOMEN IN RURAL ENTERPRISE (WIREUK.ORG)

CREATING CUSTOMER LOVE

- By choosing your clothes or accessories, customers are buying into 'slow fashion', the opposite of the disposable clothing industry. They are, therefore, likely to be interested in not only the dress, skirt or blouse itself but the story around it, including your role as the designer-maker – something that is rarely available with high-street brands. Consider how to convey your part and ethos in your branding.
- Make sure potential purchasers are well-informed about the fabric, the pattern and the process – if they feel they're wearing something truly original, they will help to sell your products for you by recommending them to others.
- If your passion is vintage fashion (the total UK second-hand market is worth around £2billion and increasing year on year), communicating the values of this style is especially important because it tends to be a way of life for customers, who will want to know the history and the heritage behind what they buy.
- Social media is perfect for visual products with a story. Pinterest has



the highest rate of clicks-to-purchase in social marketing, so is one of the best ways to display your garments, connect with customers and guide them towards a sale (ensure your links go to a site on which it is possible to buy the items; otherwise, users may lose interest and take their custom elsewhere).

CLIENTS WILL HELP
TO SELL YOUR
PRODUCTS FOR YOU
BY RECOMMENDING
THEM TO OTHERS

SELLING LIMITED EDITIONS

- It is an advantage not to be mass market, as it gives an urgency to purchase – 'nearly sold out' really does mean that – and justifies a higher price tag.
- However, take care not to frustrate customers with too many non-purchasable items on your website (nothing makes a customer disappear quicker than 'no longer available'). Explain the ranges are limited using gentle language, make the uniqueness clear on your website, keep customers informed, signpost them to something similar, offer bespoke items (if you're able to fulfil such a service) and say, where possible, when products will be back in stock.
- Take the opportunity to encourage buyers to contact you with enquiries (especially when they have shown interest in a design that has sold out). It gives you the option to offer alternatives and starts a dialogue, kindling a maker-client relationship.

SEWING A PROFIT

- There are numerous stages before clothing hits the shelves: sourcing fabric,

designing, grading, cutting and making. Ensure you have costed each element accurately and added some profit before you set your final sale price. Don't be tempted to reduce this – great style and unique items can command a premium.

- Personalised products differentiate your designs, but take care not to end up with customer returns that cannot be resold; avoid this by having robust terms and conditions, which clarify when a refund will no longer be available.
- Sourcing fabrics, accessories and haberdashery items is highly enjoyable, but try not to spend too much time at markets and wholesalers searching for the perfect lace – if you're not producing and selling, you aren't making money.

SOURCEBOOK

Fashion Angel – mentoring, networking and fashion industry expertise
(fashion-angel.co.uk)

Fashion and Textile Museum – inspiration and events
(ftmlondon.org)

The Vintage Fashion Guild – international site with a member forum
(vintagefashionguild.org)

SPARE-TIME START-UP

WORKING AROUND EXISTING COMMITMENTS

TURN PHOTOS INTO
ARTWORK

FACT FILE

NAME Liz Andreozzi**AGE** 41**LIVES IN** Petworth,
West Sussex**SPECIALISES IN**Countryside photography
and greetings cards
(07731 784286;
farmonacard-
photography.com)

"I NEVER GO OUT WITHOUT my camera, so when I had my children and wanted a flexible career I decided to do something with the photographs I'd been taking of the farm I work on," Liz says. She chose an online company to print her designs and, having experimented with different styles, settled on a mounted greetings-card option. She makes up her stock when her two sons, Tom, ten, and Archie, eight, are in bed, placing each finished item in a Cellophane wrapper, sealed with her logo sticker. What sets Liz's cards apart is their subject matter – livestock and the working countryside – something she knows a lot about as the tenant farmer, along with her husband

Phil, of a 330-acre farm. Here, in addition to offering B&B, they grow crops, keep sheep, chickens and ducks, all of which, along with their Border collie Dave, provide plenty of photographic inspiration.

Although Liz has been building her venture for six years, she officially launched at *Country Living's* Pop-up Market in March 2013 and now, as well as selling online, her range is stocked by numerous shops in the local area and further afield. "I've been very content to keep my business small. I still love photography – it remains a profitable spare-time enterprise and complements a busy farming life."





TIP Visit The Photography Show for new products, practical workshops and talks from many industry experts (photographyshow.com).

ENTERPRISING WAYS TO USE YOUR TIME

10 MINS **Protect your pictures**
The images you capture are unique, so don't forget to take steps to safeguard them. The British Library Business & IP Centre (bl.uk/bipc) has advice on registering designs, copyright and trademarks.

30 MINS **Involve your customers**
Upload your most recent images to your Facebook page and ask your followers to vote for the one they would like to see as a card or print. They will be delighted if you choose their selection and probably be more likely to buy, too.

60+ MINS **Showcase your work**
Promote your products in places that match your images; country fairs, farmers' markets and fêtes are affordable and attract the right customers. Provide items for all price points such as greetings cards, canvases and prints.

LIZ'S SPARE-TIME START-UP TIP: it can seem difficult to fit it in at weekends, but exhibiting at local shows is well worth doing as it's an excellent opportunity to engage with customers. Gathering their feedback and reflecting on it will help shape your product or service.



THE PIE MAKER

EARNING A CRUST

Jacqui Marsden explains how she left her admin job to tuck into a new role creating mouthwatering savoury pastries, in keeping with a strong family tradition

WORDS BY ANNA JURY ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALUN CALLENDER





"WHAT I DO NOW IS
SO DIFFERENT TO MY
PREVIOUS JOB – NO TWO
DAYS ARE THE SAME"



There's a tempting smell of crisping pastry wafting from the Rayburn in Jacqui Marsden's Yorkshire kitchen. Any space on the walls not filled by Shaker-style oak cupboards is covered by painted plates, glinting utensils and red and blue pans that catch the light. Lifting a tray of golden-brown pork pies out of the oven, Jacqui sends steam billowing towards the dark beams on the ceiling before placing the next batch of dough into a heavy metal contraption that would look more at home in a Victorian post office than a country kitchen.

Although this might appear odd to anyone watching, it's very much second nature for Jacqui, who's been using the device since she was a little girl. The founder of Penistone Pies, she is, in fact, part of a proud pie-making tradition and the third generation of her family to perfect the culinary art, practised in the area for centuries. It was her grandfather Freddie, who bought the Little Champion, as the machine is known, in an army-surplus sale after World War II, before installing it in his shop and using it to create pies that became renowned in the area. "I remember helping him make them when I was six or seven," Jacqui says. "The best part was being allowed to pull down the handle on the machine and seeing the warm pastry squidge over the sides."

With pie-making very much in her blood, it's no surprise that Jacqui went on to become passionate about food and cooking. However, it never occurred to her to turn her talent into turnover until four years ago. "I was working part time as a marketing assistant when they changed my hours to full time," she says, carefully tucking filling into the pastry cases. "I just couldn't manage that while looking after my sons – Ben, who was then 12, and Henry, nine – so I took voluntary redundancy." What followed was a frustrating six-month search for another job that fitted around her childcare needs: "I was standing in the kitchen



one evening, grumbling about it to my husband, when he just turned to me and said, 'Why don't you sell some of those lovely pies you make?' It wasn't something I had ever considered but it suddenly seemed to make a lot of sense."

GETTING STARTED

Jacqui, who's spent the past 20 years teaching herself a variety of culinary styles, began by making more pies for family and friends to gauge their reactions, which were unanimously positive: "I was relieved about that – the people of Yorkshire don't mince their words." Luckily, start-up costs proved fairly minimal as there was already a pantry-style space behind Jacqui's kitchen, which she set up as her 'pie room'. Here, she could maintain the meticulous standards required for a top food-hygiene rating of '5' and stock a dedicated fridge. After that, she used £500 of savings to buy necessary equipment, including pie tins, utensils and a food processor. It also covered the cost of printing leaflets and stationery. She then took a stall at nearby Holmfirth Market every Saturday and, later, another at Penistone Market on Thursdays: "It was wonderful to have people telling me that my pies were the best they've ever tasted."

The change of career turned out to have other benefits, too, for Jacqui, who did a secretarial course after leaving school before going on to a number of clerical



jobs, including 14 years as a pensions administrator: "Working in that kind of environment could feel incredibly monotonous – it was often just boredom punctuated by cups of tea. Doing what I do now is completely different – no two days are the same and I get to meet all kinds of people. I still find it funny to say I'm a pie maker, though."

Rather than a commute to the office, Jacqui's day now starts with collecting feed for her four Hampshire Down sheep, eight hens and a cockerel at the corn mill down the hill from her house ("I look quite a sight pulling up in my red Nissan Micra next to all those tractors"), before dropping off the boys at school. She will ➡





then pick up the ingredients for that day's batch of pies: meat from the local butcher's, and flour and other dry goods from High Royd Farm Shop in nearby Hoylandswaine. In a standard baking session she will produce 76 pies, a quantity that sees her go through 12kg of flour and 2kg of fat every month. The eggs come from her own chickens and many of the vegetables, most notably the leeks for her bestselling Chicken & Leek pies, are from her own vegetable patch. Once the animals are fed, vegetables gathered and any weeds kept in check, she'll then settle down to the real business of the day. On Mondays that means keeping on top of general admin and social media; any other day will see her disappearing into her 'pie room' to prepare for the next market until she needs to leave for the

school run. Jacqui's range of fillings also includes Beef & Potato, Game, Lamb & Mint or Steak, but she admits that her pork pies always have been and always will be her favourite.

PASSING ON EXPERTISE

Adding another string to her culinary bow last year, Jacqui started offering cookery classes, during which she passes on her three generations-worth of pie-making expertise. "We've had hen parties and all sorts of groups – people love being hands-on and enjoy wandering into the garden with a colander to pick the ingredients or gather eggs from the chickens," she says.

Jacqui currently offers two or three classes each month, not only on pie-making but also on hearty home cooking and perfect pastry making, but they have proved so popular that she's now looking forward to providing more in the future: "Running these sessions means that I'm earning more now than I was when I was working as a marketing assistant, which was really what I set out to do. Ultimately, I feel very proud to be able to contribute to the family coffers by doing something I love."

i For more information, visit penistonepies.co.uk.





Q&A

JACQUI MARSDEN, PENISTONE PIES

When you started, what was your goal?

I wanted to work for myself doing something I truly loved while earning as much as I did in my previous role. Gradually, I've succeeded and, finally, make more money – but it has taken years.

Have you made any sacrifices?

No, life has only improved. I don't have a scary boss breathing down my neck and I can go outside into my garden to have lunch in the sun. Perhaps occasionally it could be lonely working for yourself, but I make sure that I see plenty of people. I'm also a member of a group that supports the British pork industry (called Ladies in Pigs) and I have a very supportive family.

What have you found most challenging?

Finances; both budgeting and making money can be tricky. Sometimes it's quite difficult to be honest with yourself about the fact that you're not earning enough and you need to implement some changes. It was also slow to get going initially because I couldn't get into Penistone Market as it already offered a similar product. Given that I make Penistone Pies, it was really important to me that I had a stall there. It took a great



"IT'S IMPORTANT TO BE FLEXIBLE – I HAD NEVER CONSIDERED TEACHING WHEN I BEGAN, BUT NOW IT TAKES UP MOST OF MY TIME, AND I REALLY ENJOY IT"

deal of patience and perseverance, but eventually I was given a place.

How do you make a company stand out?

Be individual, offer something others can't, and be the best. They may not be particularly fancy, but my pies are home-cooked, delicious and made from local produce.

What are you most proud of?

Setting up Penistone Pies & Puddings Cookery Courses all by myself. It took a lot of hard work.

Were your feelings about the pastime altered when it went from hobby to business?

No, I still really enjoy it. Food

is such an important part of my family life. We always make sure we sit around the table for dinner and have a good chat – and I try to reflect that ethos within my business. Also, my confidence has grown since starting out.

What are the pros and cons of working for yourself?

I love being able to decide what I do. For me, there aren't any cons – I love my little business.

Were there any surprises along the way?

Yes, mainly how much I enjoy teaching, and the lovely people I've met on my courses. It's like having a group of friends around. Years ago, I worked in an office and used to know what time of day it was by the type of paperwork I was doing. How times have changed; now, some days I'm rushed off my feet, and on others very little happens.

What advice would you give others just starting out?

Have patience, be open-minded and don't give up. It's also important to be flexible. I had never considered teaching when I began, but now it takes up most of my time. So it's wise to be adaptable. Things don't happen overnight or by accident; you've really got to persevere to make a business work.

WORDS FROM THE WISE



Tom Joule, founder and chief brand officer, Joules

"I grew up in Leicestershire, so from a young age loved the great outdoors. To me, spending time in the fresh air with friends and family is what weekends and time off is all about. It was this love that led me to create Joules in 1989 – back then, outdoor wear seemed to be all green or brown. I thought it would be great for people to enjoy being outside dressed in clothes that reflected their colourful personalities. My first items were bright-pink wellies – I bought 100 pairs and they sold like hot cakes! It was proof that there was a demand for bold colour – from there Joules was born and it has flourished ever since."

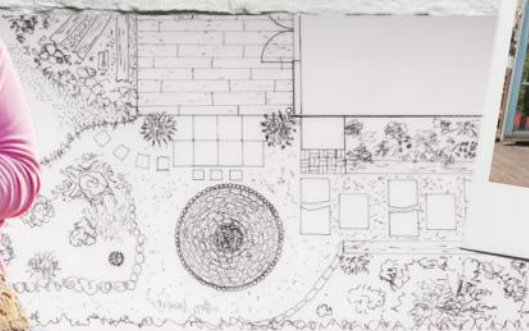
joulesgroup.com



SEW • COOK • WRITE • DRAW • MAKE • GROW



TAKING THE *first* steps



Taking the first steps

When launching a start-up, the most important thing to do is take action: set your goals and plan your business – don't let it stay in your head

WORDS BY FIONA DAVIES

YOUR PRODUCT AND CUSTOMERS

You have an idea in place and you are clear about what your product is (that is whatever you are selling, be that an item, a service, an overnight stay or a shop) – next, spend some time researching the market. Start with the competition:

- How do they do it?
- What is the customer experience?
- What is their pricing policy?
- Where do they promote their products?
- Can their offering be improved?

If there isn't any competition, ask yourself why that is. It may not be a viable product or there may not be a market for it. Ever wondered why there are at least five coffee shops on every high street? People want coffee, it's as simple as that. Don't worry about doing the same as other businesses – just do it better, be unique or present your item or service at a different price.

VISUALISE YOUR BUSINESS

Start to plump up the idea, then fine-tune it with the customer in mind:



What will your product look like?

- How will you make it?
- Who are your customers?
- How will you attract them?
- Where will you sell your product?
- How will you price it?
- How does it compare with the competition?

Create an initial sketch of the whole process. Take it from raw materials to completed purchase. Include everything involved: production, suppliers, marketing, sales, financials and people. It will probably change as the business grows and become slicker but breaking down all the steps will create a to-do

list for launch and help you keep on track.

Even very early on it's worth developing a brand image. Base this on your personality, your story and values, and the customers you are appealing to. This will thread through all your marketing and conversations, give your enterprise a voice, help differentiate you from the competition and build loyalty. Consumers prefer to spend their money with companies that share their values, so one with a clear identity has an easier time finding and keeping devoted customers.

THE BEAUTY OF A PLAN

People will tell you that the first thing you need to do is write a business plan, which usually fills fledgling entrepreneurs with horror – all those creative thoughts being turned into numbers. The good news is that unless you are applying for external financing, you don't need to produce a hefty tome, just a written strategy that you can modify and personalise as you grow your start-up. You wouldn't embark on a long journey without some directions, a vague idea of where you are going and a full tank of fuel, so think of your plan as a route map. Writing something down helps to:

- Clarify your business idea
- Spot potential problems
- Set out your goals
- Monitor success and failure

FUNDING SUCCESS

All new enterprises need some finance to get started, but how much really depends on the sort of business and, most crucially on how much of a gamble you are prepared to take. The majority launch with their own savings or modest



loans from friends and family; starting small and growing organically, scaling up production and activity in line with increasing income. It reduces financial risk in the early days, lets you test the market and avoids costly

production mistakes. If you are aiming bigger, there are loans available that are geared towards the needs of small businesses; they also offer mentoring and support in the early days (see the assistance section in the directory).

ENTERPRISING WAYS TO USE YOUR TIME

10
MINS

Start to build up a following (or likes) on social media and talk to your potential customers. You don't have to post about your product but always be 'on brand'. If you are starting a B&B, for example, describe the countryside, walks, and fauna and flora – and illustrate your posts with beautiful photography. When you launch you will have a ready-made group of invested followers; a sale is just a click away.

30
MINS

Analyse how you spend your working day. Create a spreadsheet with 15-minute increments and log what you're doing as you go along, then review it.

60+
MINS

Research, research and more research. Use time in front of your computer to find industry facts and figures, sign up for newsletters, read blogs, buy products online and note the customer experience. The more you know, the better you will be equipped to deal with all eventualities.

SEW • COOK • WRITE • DRAW • MAKE • GROW



CASE STUDY: A GAP IN THE MARKET

When Women in Rural Enterprise (wireuk.org) member Katie Millard opened a café in the market town of Oswestry, there were plenty of others already. However, she felt there was a gap in the market for a child-friendly option with play areas, buggy parking, a friendly attitude towards little ones and a varied menu for all tastes (big and small) – and the parents she talked to agreed. Baby Bird Café (babybirdcafe.co.uk) is a huge success, it has a different feel to the competition and attracts customers who previously felt uncomfortable in more formal places. Katie created a new market from an existing concept.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY RAVENSPPOINT MARKETING; JANINE SPEAKE

KNEADING A NEW DIRECTION

A desire for more time with her family led Lucie Steel to launch her own breadmaking venture. Now, not only do her artisan loaves sell out but she takes pleasure in passing on her skills to others, too

WORDS BY KATE LANGRISH ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALUN CALLENDER



An old sea container might seem like a surprising home for an artisan micro-bakery, but it ticks all the right boxes for Lucie Steel. “Before, I was working in my kitchen using an old woodburning stove – it only took a few loaves at a time, so I’d be up all night baking. Now I have room for my mixers and an industrial deck oven, which bakes 18 loaves in an hour. I’m still up all night, but at least I’m producing more bread!” says Lucie, 49, who now runs Birch Cottage Bread from ‘the box’, just outside Hermitage in Berkshire. Crucially, the 22-foot sea container was also cheap – and this allowed her to make the leap from a practice manager at an equine vets’ to a baker who has people queuing for her sourdough loaves, honey-malted granary rolls and deliciously moreish Swedish seeded crackerbreads.

Lucie grew up on a remote 2,500-acre hill farm in Sutherland, Highlands. “My mum baked and cooked everything from scratch – by the time I left for college, I’d never even eaten a ready meal,” she says. It was the death of her mother in 2009 that prompted Lucie to rethink her life: “My son, Ralph, was just about to start school and I wanted to spend more time with him.” She booked onto a ➡





"BAKING ENGAGES EVERY SENSE – THE AMAZING SMELL, THE GOLDEN COLOUR AND THERE'S THE TASTE"

bread-making course at Virtuous Bread in London, part of the Bread Angels group set up by Jane Mason to train people in the art of creating real loaves with the aim that they take those skills and pass them on. "I don't know what I was expecting, but I fell in love with the whole process,"



Lucie recalls. "The thing about baking bread is that it engages every sense. The amazing smell, the golden brown colour, the sound of the breaking of crust – and then, of course, there's the taste. I knew I had to keep doing it."

MAKING IT WORK

At first, Lucie merely gave away loaves in the playground in return for honest feedback, but the calls for more and more of her creations made her consider turning this new passion into a business, and she signed up for the Virtuous Bread course on setting up a micro-bakery. "Afterwards, I saw an advert for a local community market in the village of Aldworth, so I took 20 sourdoughs and totally expected to come back with them," Lucie says. "But I sold out – I realised then that I could make it work."

By Christmas 2011, the business had started to snowball, with Lucie supplying local shops and a catering company, as well as attending several markets each month. She lives in a 19th-century tied cottage in the middle of the woodlands where her forester husband Matthew works, so extending the kitchen was out of the question. "I had heard of people using sea containers for catering. They



are rodent-proof and easy to clean, and, as it's not a permanent structure, Eling Estate would allow me to have it in the garden," explains Lucie, who searched endlessly online for sea containers before finding one that fitted the bill. "It cost £2,959, so I used my small inheritance – I knew that my mum would definitely have approved."

THE RIGHT INGREDIENTS

In April 2012, the sea container arrived and Lucie set about sourcing catering equipment as economically as possible on ebay and at auction. Most days she can be found in 'the box' kneading and shaping the bread. "Anyone can make dough; it's just flour, yeast, salt and water. The important thing is to have good-quality flour – preferably stoneground, as it's created with less heat, so the grains retain more of their natural oils," explains Lucie, who uses flour from Shipton Mill in Gloucestershire and Stoate & Sons in Dorset. She mixes this with the natural yeast from her sourdough starter before placing the loaves to prove in banneton baskets to get the traditional 'snail' shape.

In keeping with the Bread Angels ethos to spread the word about real bread,

Lucie also sets aside one day each week to teach courses on Basic Bread, Sourdough Bread and Basic Italian Bread. "I can get a bit evangelical about it," she confesses.

With regular requests from shops and cafés to stock her loaves, there is now more demand for her creations than she has time to fill. And, although Lucie strives to maintain a balance between work and family life, she admits that when she's not getting up at 4am to start baking, she relishes researching and concocting new recipes: "Yes, it's got to be said, I do spend a lot of time thinking about bread!"

1 *Birch Cottage Bread courses start at £70 per person (breadangels.com).*





www.breadangels.com

Q&A

LUCIE STEEL, BIRCH COTTAGE BREAD

How did you find the time to set up your own enterprise?

I'd already given up my full-time job so I could be at the school gates to collect my children and had taken on several part-time roles to help pay the bills – this meant that I had opportunities in between to start my venture.

Did yours seem like a realistic business idea when you first thought of it?

I knew that there was a real need for good-quality bread, but it did take a while to gain some self-belief. At first, I didn't think that anyone would buy my loaves or take a class with me, but when I gave bakes away for feedback, I realised that people were actually prepared to pay for my product.

How did you cope with all the essential admin?

The paperwork is easy. It's a good idea to speak to your local council and tell them what you're planning to do – they are there to help guide you.

What basic budgeting techniques did you use initially?

I gave myself a start-up budget and stuck to it. I had to make a few sacrifices along the way, but as the business built up I was able to plough some money back in to afford the extra elements I wanted.



"INITIALLY, I WANTED
TO SAY 'YES' TO EVERY
BUSINESS THAT
ASKED ME TO SUPPLY
IT, BUT I HAVE
LEARNED THAT
I CAN'T DO IT ALL"

Have you made any sacrifices?

Yes, sleep! I just don't get enough of it. Bakers rise very early, so I am always catching up.

What has been your biggest challenge?

It must be learning to say 'no'. Initially, I wanted to say 'yes' to every business that asked me to supply it, but I have gradually learned that I can't do it all.

How do you make your company stand out?

Everything I bake is sold the same day. Sometimes loaves are still warm at the market. I'm genuinely excited by what I do and this certainly comes across in my classes.

Your proudest moment so far?

I feel really pleased when those I've taught tell me they haven't bought a shop loaf since taking my class.

What's the best advice you've been given?

Customers buy people first and products second, so do something you're genuinely passionate about and this will shine through.

Any plans for the future?

I would love to have my own bakery in the future but for now the business works around my family really well.

Have you made any big adjustments?

I'm very disciplined at work but not so much at home, so I've had to learn to be much more organised than usual.

Do you have any advice for others just starting out?

Make sure you know your market and try to understand what people want. It's no good making something you like but that no one will actually buy. Attend small markets in your area with your product and carry out some research about purchasing habits.

Producing food

Food and drink is the largest manufacturing sector in the UK, with a turnover of £95.4bn and more than 6,000 enterprises – many are small companies with fewer than ten employees. With careful planning and a delicious product, a small slice of that pie could be yours



WORDS BY FIONA DAVIES BUSINESS MANAGER, WOMEN IN RURAL ENTERPRISE (WIREUK.ORG)

ENSURE YOUR BUSINESS IS WITHIN THE RULES

- All food enterprises must comply with specific hygiene and health-and-safety regulations; they protect and reassure customers, and help you run a thriving business.
- Find out about legislation and guidelines that might apply to your products: what labelling is needed; how to list contents; any modifications you must make to your kitchen; and what practices you need to adopt.
- Be sure your business plan includes being able to support the work and costs involved.
- Contact your environmental health officer (based at the council) before you start – they will be able to help you with the points mentioned above.
- You might also need change-of-use permission for food premises. Your council is also the port of call for this.
- Be positive about the regulations and keep them up to date; make your successes into a story and display your certificates with pride.

DELIVER WHAT PEOPLE WANT

- Make sure your product is consistent; customers need



to know they can come back for more of the same and be confident that they can recommend you. If your offering is different every time, they will be less enthusiastic. Write down the variables, including ingredients, their origins, cooking methods, timing and even the weather, as these factors can affect taste, texture and appearance.

- Build up a list of reliable and flexible suppliers;

SOCIAL MEDIA IS
GREAT FOR FOOD
BUSINESSES,
ESPECIALLY THE
VISUAL PLATFORMS

you need them to produce top-quality products. Forge relationships and treat them like customers. They know the sector, can source just about anything and will happily recommend your business if you have a good relationship. Need 100 quail's eggs for an urgent order? They will be willing to help if they know and like you (free samples and tasting sessions could help here).

- If you are not selling in a shop, make sure customers know where and when they can find your products; consider putting lists of regular outlets on or in the packaging.

FIND AND KEEP CUSTOMERS

- Even if you are not selling online, a blog is a low-cost way to generate interest in your business. Basic platforms are free; try wordpress.com and reddit.com. Food is very visual, so share beautiful photos, too. Don't use those from stock libraries as people are more likely to buy when they see truly mouthwatering images.
- Be creative about your marketing – think about where your customers

might be and take your products there.

- Keep a close eye on your finances; production wastage and out-of-date products can make or break a food business.
- Encourage customers to engage with you; social media is great for food businesses especially the visual platforms Instagram and Pinterest – they help build a community and a buzz around your food.
- Build your brand – talk about the origins of your ingredients if they're local, what you love about certain recipes and include your baking background on your packaging, flyers, website or Facebook page. It all makes you unique.

SOURCEBOOK

Food Standards Agency
– a non-ministerial government department responsible for food safety and food hygiene across the UK (food.gov.uk)

Food and Drink Federation
– the trade organisation for the food and drink industry (fdfor.org.uk)

Food Stories – an inspiring example of a culinary blog (helengraves.co.uk)

SPARE-TIME START-UP

WORKING AROUND EXISTING COMMITMENTS

RUN CLASSES IN
CRAFTING

FACT FILE

NAME Alison Cooke**AGE** 59**LIVES IN** Northam,
Devon**SPECIALISES IN**One-to-one
sewing classes
(01237 421809)

What was the inspiration behind your business? My aunt encouraged me to sew when I was ten and, although I went on to become a nurse, I continued making my own clothes and furnishings. One day my hobby came up in conversation at work and before I knew it, I was showing people how to sew.

How did you get started? I rented a back room in a shop after-hours and created an eye-catching poster to advertise my 'Learn to Sew' class – I had pretty fabrics to use. It proved popular so I ran another, and one year later, in 2013, I bought eight sewing machines from a very supportive local dealer and ran regular sessions.

I also signed up for some free courses with North Devon Plus (northdevonplus.com), an agency that works with the local council to support enterprise in the area, which covered customer service, social media and networking.

How has the business changed since you launched? It was a real challenge to pay living expenses using the income from my fledgling business, so I looked for something to supplement my earnings. I found out about Airbnb and it really appealed, so now I let my spare rooms to paying guests and this helps bring in the extra funds I need. They come from all over the world – Europe, Canada and New Zealand – and some

of them even take up the offer of an impromptu sewing lesson, too. It's an ideal way to combine both interests.

Describe a typical working day. In addition to the informal classes with B&B guests, I run one or two sessions per month, but I also take Sew Country out to teach in customers' homes. As I now receive so many international visitors, I've also been working on a collection of homeware featuring scenes from this area of north Devon, which guests enjoy buying to remind them of their stay.

What's your current ambition?

I would like to offer weekends when women can choose to surf in the morning (very popular in these parts), sew in the afternoon and share a delicious meal in the evening.

Biggest challenge? Having the confidence to give up a regular income. I wish I'd done it sooner, though. Now I'm in complete control of my time and what I do. I don't ever want to work for anyone else again. I also didn't save enough money to start Sew Country with. I should have had a separate budget so I didn't dip into domestic expenditure.

Best thing about running your own business? Seeing people's faces light up when they master a new technique and leave proudly holding their finished item.



TIP

Search for craft workshops, courses and fairs at ukcraftfairs.com. The site will also help you to find suppliers for all the materials you will need, plus information to get you started.

ENTERPRISING WAYS TO USE YOUR TIME

10
MINS

Be social Tell your followers about future classes – or ask their thoughts on potential ones – and contact new customers when cooking your dinner or even during TV advert breaks, using Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

30
MINS

Get cover You will need public liability insurance to run classes from any space. Visit abi.org.uk for more.

60
MINS

Test the water Put together hands-on taster sessions for each of your workshops in the form

of pop-ups – during lunchtimes in the office or at home in the evenings – to get valuable feedback from colleagues and friends on what works well and what aspects of your business could be improved.

ALISON'S SPARE-TIME START-UP TIP: begin slowly and ask your friends to help out for payment in kind. You need plenty of support in the early days and people are generally very willing to lend a hand.

THE GARDENER

IN FULL BLOOM

Harnessing her creativity after years working in the family business, one woman is flourishing in her new role outdoors

WORDS BY PAULA McWATERS ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY JACQUI HURST



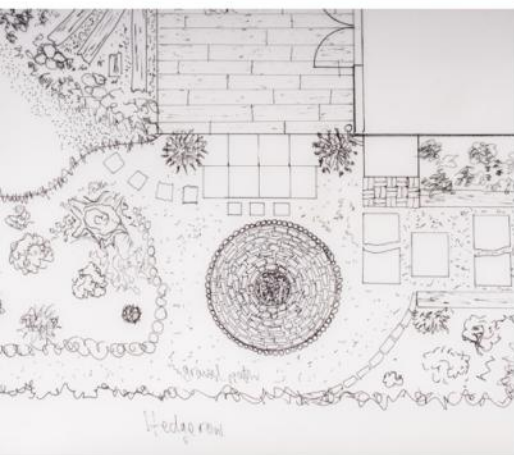
The summer sun filters through the windows of Jeni Cairns' Nissen hut studio as she sits at a drawing board, adding some final watercolour detail to her planting plan for a client, with sheepdog Star snoozing at her feet. Out of the open door, the view across her Cambridgeshire garden takes in the decking that she and husband Brian created from old scaffold boards, and the Wendy house where she played as a child, which now serves as a store for her forks and spades. In between is the rusty iron firepit, a feature transported here from her award-winning Artisan's Retreat show garden at the 2013 Harrogate Autumn Flower Show.

For garden designer Jeni, bringing these elements together in one beautiful space is what life is now all about. However, it wasn't until 2008, when she bought her grandparents' farm cottage with a spacious garden, that Jeni's greenfingered talents began to emerge. At the time, she was juggling her work at the pizza shop that Brian runs in the nearby village of Whittlesey with raising their two children, Cameron and Indiana, now 16 and 11. Having studied art and design at college and fine art at university, she squeezed in time to practise her drawing skills when she could. Jeni ➞





A DISTANCE-LEARNING COURSE INTRODUCED HER TO EVERYTHING FROM COSTING TO PLANTING PLANS



had always had a love of the outdoors following her upbringing on her parents' and grandparents' Fenland arable and pig farms a few miles east of Peterborough and had a mental picture of how she wanted her outside space to look, but lacked the horticultural skills to make it happen. Then she found a distance-learning course in garden design that she could fit around her commitments. "It was a turning point to start something I really wanted to do," she says. The KLC School of Design diploma had no set time limit for its completion, so she was able to follow the tasks at her own pace; and the fees (£1,200 then, now £1,600) could be paid in instalments. She revelled in the challenge of learning everything from surveying and costing to creating planting plans, and filled up a portfolio with schemes and moodboards. It was also possible to spread out other investments, which included a drawing board and

technical pens (£100), a secondhand laptop (£350) and a digital measuring device for surveying (£300).

A WINNING COMBINATION

After just a year and only part-way through the modules, Jeni entered a Landmark Trust competition to create a knot garden and came first in the student category: "It was such a buzz. I then used my £2,000 winnings to build a show garden at the Harrogate Spring Flower Show 2011." This was an amazing challenge for the fledgling designer, especially as she had to keep within the £2,000 budget and only had Brian and some friends to help her build it. "Without them, I couldn't have done it," she recalls. "My brother lent me his van, I stayed for free with a friend's parents in York and other people grew plants for me. It was a struggle, but so exciting! I went from crying on the first day to feeling elated" ➔





when I won a Silver Gilt award.” Since then, Jeni has produced three more show gardens at Harrogate, all of which won Premier Gold awards, and another at Hampton Court in 2014, sponsored by Metal, a national arts organisation, and scooped not only a Gold but the Best Summer Garden award.

NEW CHALLENGES

An ecological, wildlife-friendly thread runs through Jeni’s work and her planting style is naturalistic, combining grasses and perennials for a harmonious look: “I challenge myself to design with different combinations of plants, which stretches my knowledge for varying conditions.” One of her trademarks is the inventive use of found materials, so a broken soil sieve is turned into an insect hotel, a drain cover becomes a stepping stone, and a set of animal feeders and a galvanised crate transform into a water feature.

The show gardens offer Jeni a ‘shop window’ for her work and they encourage

her to learn new skills. For her first, she tackled willow weaving and for her Hampton Court garden, she taught herself to use a plasma cutter to slice intricate designs into metal oil drums to eye-catching effect. Private commissions have trickled in and she will also plan and plant up borders – a task she relishes. She still helps Brian at the pizza shop on Friday and Saturday evenings to maintain a steady income, and her experience with budgeting and book-keeping has proved useful for setting up her new enterprise: “There are different avenues a garden designer can take and I prefer to provide clients with a scheme and encourage them to find their own contractor. For now, my goal is to use my artistic and horticultural skills and enjoy the variety of tasks that this entails. No two days are ever the same.”

i *Juniper House Garden Design*
(07541 229447; juniperhousegardendesign.com).



ART WORK BACKDROP
I wanted to create an eye catching art work as a backdrop to my booth, using reclaimed materials. I love the colours, tones and textures you can get from old materials. I used a mixture of old steel, reclaimed roofing slates and combine hardware (threading screws with abstract paintings behind, combined with found pieces such as old, rusted metal, galvanized, the mesh panels provide pattern and you could use what you behind- slate, mirror or abstract). The materials are balanced and composition of the things rather than trying to hide them so used agricultural (overlaid) washers and bolts. I arranged the materials in a balanced composition of squares and rectangles.

Using garden sieves and rubble placed with Sedum and sempervivum as living soil works. I found one into a sculpture from the corners of the metals when (choosing the plain combinations in the back of the head) and used reclaimed railway sleepers, a reclaimed curved oak beam, and a beautiful piece of willow tree that had been used as a wheelbarrow wheel.

Gravel and various metal agricultural salvage items.



PLANT LIST

Forams and shrubs: 1. *Lavender strobilata*, 2. *Echinops purpureus*, 3. *Veronica spicata*, 4. *Verbascum*, 5. *Artemisia*, 6. *White*, 7. *Veronica hirsuta*, 8. *Verbena heterophylla*, 9. *Ceratostigma plumbaginoides*, 10. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 11. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 12. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 13. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 14. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 15. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 16. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 17. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 18. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 19. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 20. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 21. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 22. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 23. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 24. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 25. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 26. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 27. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 28. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 29. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 30. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 31. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 32. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 33. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 34. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 35. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 36. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 37. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 38. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 39. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 40. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 41. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 42. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 43. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 44. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 45. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 46. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 47. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 48. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 49. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 50. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 51. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 52. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 53. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 54. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 55. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 56. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 57. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 58. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 59. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 60. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 61. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 62. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 63. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 64. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 65. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 66. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 67. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 68. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 69. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 70. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 71. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 72. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 73. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 74. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 75. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 76. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 77. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 78. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 79. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 80. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 81. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 82. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 83. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 84. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 85. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 86. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 87. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 88. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 89. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 90. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 91. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 92. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 93. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 94. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 95. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 96. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 97. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 98. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 99. *Epipactis atrorubra*, 100. *Epipactis atrorubra*.

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Mark Diacono

Entryside Detective

THE
WILD GARDEN

Q&A

JENI CAIRNS, JUNIPER HOUSE GARDEN DESIGN

Where do you get your inspiration from?

I'm a natural observer and everything I see influences me, whether I'm walking in a stunning landscape, discovering self-sown seedlings in a crevice or stumbling upon a beautiful piece of art in a museum.

What do you most enjoy about being a gardener?

It's different every day and I am constantly being challenged, which I love.

What do you wish you'd known before launching?

That people really are willing to help you and offer tips, so it's a good idea to get in touch with other entrepreneurs who are doing something similar.

Have you made any sacrifices?

Yes, the ability to switch off from my business – there are always emails to answer and paperwork to do. I don't go to an office or have a nine-to-five routine, so it is difficult to finish the working day.

When you started, what was your goal?

I wrote down my objectives in a notebook and they included entering a garden competition. At the time I thought this was overly ambitious, but when I looked at the book recently I realised I'd achieved all my aims, so now I should write a new set!



"IT CAN BE DIFFICULT TO HEAR, BUT SOMETIMES THE BEST ADVICE COMES IN THE FORM OF CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM AND THE ODD NEGATIVE COMMENT"

What has been your biggest challenge?

Believing in myself and my own ability.

How did you overcome any difficulties?

Through hard work and a can-do attitude. Asking for advice from people I trust helps a great deal – my dad has been brilliant.

Did you do any market research?

I visited gardens and shows, and read inspirational books and magazines.

Your proudest moment so far?

Completing my first show

garden – something that I achieved with very little money, few resources and no external help.

What is the greatest advantage of working for yourself?

Being able to steer myself in the direction I actually want to go in.

What's the best advice you've been given?

It can be difficult to hear, but sometimes the best guidance comes in the form of constructive criticism and the odd negative comment. They have really driven me to prove myself and my abilities.

The most useful lesson you've had along the way?

To keep on learning, to be adaptable and to continue to challenge myself. If I keep doing these things, I'll continue to grow.

What has been your best decision?

To ditch the fear and just go for my dreams.

Do you have any advice for others just starting out?

Learn as much as you can and take risks, doing things that are just a little outside your comfort zone. Don't be afraid to fail – no one is going to laugh at you. In fact, they will probably admire you. Learn from mistakes and follow your intuition. When things feel right, they usually are.

WORDS FROM THE WISE



Emma Bridgewater, homeware designer and business founder

"If you can possibly find a way to put your idea in front of potential customers, do it! Don't dither. Make 100 pieces of pottery (or whatever it is you do) or create a compelling invitation to sample your home-catering service, for example. Do it right now and set up your stall. If you are run off your feet, then it's time to write a business plan, and you will have a piece of real evidence on which to base a first sales forecast. If the response is muted, you need to rethink, refine or throw out your first idea and keep doing this until you feel the thrill of sales." emmabridgewater.co.uk



SEW • COOK • WRITE • DRAW • MAKE • GROW





Whatever you decide to do
make sure it
makes you
HAPPY



*starting
out
ON A
shoestring*



Starting out on a shoestring

With more than three billion people using the internet, fledgling entrepreneurs can access a worldwide customer base for very little cost

WORDS BY FIONA DAVIES

Previously promoting products to customers was costly and time consuming but you can now access thousands of potential buyers with the click of a button. It is easy to spend all your time on myriad online facilities, but in reality you need just a few platforms.

YOUR WEBSITE

Be clear about what you want, whether that's traffic, enquiries, web sales or just an online brochure. Next, sketch out a brief, above all making sure it is always easy for customers to do what you want them to. Decide how much of a role you'd like to take in the construction, design and administration, from commissioning a whole build by a web agency to a template-based site. Whatever you choose, make sure it:

- Has a good content management system, otherwise you'll have to go back to the web designer (and pay them) each time you want to update it.
- Is marketing-focused to improve the profile of the



site; include a blog or news if you want high search rankings and to attract traffic from Google (it rates regular and new content)

- Makes the most of social media feeds to keep the home page current and

customers aware of your other activity

- Is mobile enabled, the world is increasingly viewing via a small screen and Google ranks adjusted sites highly, so make sure yours can scale for tiny screens
- Reflects your brand (not your personal taste) and features the best photography that you can afford – it can turn a mediocre web presence into a great one

Take time to understand title tags and meta descriptions. They make a big difference when you optimise your site for search engines. To find out how people use your site, sign up for Google Analytics.

ENTERPRISING WAYS TO USE YOUR TIME

10
MINS

Create great images. Photograph anything and everything to do with your venture, then design visuals to use in social media with the help of free tools such as Canva (canva.com).

30
MINS

Fiddle with your finance spreadsheets; use auto calculate (a function on Microsoft Excel) to experiment with what your profits looks like if you increase the price or your sales by ten per cent and see what happens to your bottom line if you reduce costs. Do this for a whole year and see how much more profitable you will be – it's highly motivating.

60
MINS

Analyse your social media activity. It is time-consuming to keep your content fresh and relevant but it is wasted if no one is listening to what you say. All the major platforms offer a means to do this (just search the name of your platform and 'analytics').

SOCIAL MEDIA

Whether you use Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, online networking is incredibly cost effective and should form a large part of your marketing activity. For advice on this topic, see the Sell, Sell, Sell chapter.

PRICING FOR PROFIT

Perfecting what you charge is a science, not an art. It's

*If balancing the books
floors you, find an
accountant who you
trust and who takes
the time to understand
your business. They
will become part of
your team as your
company grows*

tempting to pick a similar figure to the competition, but to ensure profitability, start with a number: your break-even point. This is the payment you need in order to cover all the business costs, including the factors that vary with the number of items or services sold such as materials, products, electricity, packaging and marketing. But don't forget to take account of others such as business rates, wages, rent and your own time. Once you know this, consider:

- What your product/service will be worth to customers
- What your competitors charge

The traditional approach adds a percentage mark-up to the break-even point. However, you can also base the amount you charge on the value your customers attach to the product or service; it could be higher based on the uniqueness.

Stay flexible, aware of the competition and the market and review your prices regularly. However, beware of discounting – it might

seem like a small amount, but it makes a large dent in your profit. Most of all, don't under-value yourself or your goods, but be confident that what you're selling is worth it.

BALANCING THE BOOKS

When you're at the planning stage, map out a survival strategy detailing your current expenditure (household and personal bills). Then create a cash flow forecast month-by-month, detailing: your product and other business costs (money out) and how much you think you'll sell (money in). This will tell you how much you need to sell to cover your own financial needs and all your business expenditure, and the margin you can expect to make, too. As you start to trade, the actual will overtake the forecast and the cash flow will become your guide. It will be a tool to predict business profitability. Break down sales by product, and note activity for each. The more detailed your records, the better you'll be able to identify what sells and where, then plan around that.

SEW • COOK • WRITE • DRAW • MAKE • GROW



CASE STUDY: ENGAGING DIRECT WITH CUSTOMERS

In 2008, Barbara Steadman started online store Another Gorgeous Day (anothergorgeousday.co.uk), which specialises in signs bearing sayings, as a part-time passion inspired by her love of language. Traffic and sales via her website built gradually, but it was Barbara's interaction with people via free-to-use social media channels in 2010 that opened up a new and unexpected market. Engaging with users of Twitter and Facebook made her realise that they had stories and quotes of their own. Adding bespoke wall plaques, gifts and decorations featuring these galvanised the business and allowed Barbara to give up her day job – and none of the research cost her a penny.

Whatever you decide to do
make sure it
makes you
HAPPY!

Personalised wall plaques from
www.anothergorgeousday.co.uk

THE WALLPAPER DESIGNER

GETTING INTO PRINT

It was only after years in a variety of different jobs that Alison Porter struck on the idea of using her country-themed illustrations to earn an income. Now her nostalgic designs decorate homes across the country

WORDS BY CAROLINE ATKINS ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALUN CALLENDER







COUNTRYGOER
and Forests
COUNTRYGOER'S
Nature Notes



HOUSEANDGARDEN.CO.UK/JU

Dig in

ing, where to go, what's in flower and what to buy this month
NEWS COMPILED BY SORREL EVERYTY





"I GAVE THE PRINTERS FABRIC
SCRAPS AND FLOWERS TO
COLOUR-MATCH"



A late cream rose, tinged with pink, scrambles over the hedge just outside Alison Porter's window. Inside her Somerset workshop, newly converted from a dilapidated hay store, white-painted walls are hung with lengths of the traditionally printed wallpaper that she sells under her 'Cowparsley at home' label. Moodboards pinned with swatches, paint charts and magazine cuttings are propped on a bench. At the trestle table, Alison is studying berries and flowers, picking her colours from an Emma Bridgewater mug full of watercolour crayons, while a sheaf of sketches next to her shows images of rabbits, ducks and teddy bears in different poses.

Alison inherited her passion for drawing from her father, an RAF officer ("but he could have been an illustrator," she says), and has always found refuge in

creating visual stories to get her through difficult times. But it wasn't something she thought of turning into a career: instead she initially wanted to be a farmer (she went to agricultural college and still knows how to reverse a tractor and trailer), worked for many years as a nanny and then did a floristry course ("which taught me everything about colour and composition"). It wasn't until two years ago, when she moved to the village of Higher Wambrook, just outside Chard, that she decided to combine her hobby with her love of creating a home and produce wallpapers based on her drawings.

"My daughter Florence had grown up and moved away, so I needed to find something new to nurture," she says, "and I think I was hankering to root myself somewhere, because my childhood was quite nomadic: my father's work meant ➡



WALLPAPERS ENCAPSULATE THE PAST, ALISON SAYS: "PEEL THEM BACK AND YOU DISCOVER HIDDEN LAYERS THAT PEOPLE HAVE LOVED"



we were always moving and didn't really settle properly in England until I was about 11." As a result, she always envied friends with big families and rambling farmhouses – the sense of a place growing organically and becoming loved.

That was what she wanted to capture in her nostalgic wallpapers, with designs inspired by childhood memories – a friend's rocking horse, a blue-and-white stripe that reminded her of seaside holidays, and an old-fashioned English rose based on a wallpaper she remembered from her aunt's house in Cornwall. Wallpapers encapsulate the past, she points out: "Peel them back and you discover hidden layers that people have loved."

MADE IN THE UK

Alison had already mapped out a collection of ideas, and – knowing that

she would prefer her papers to be produced in Britain – had found the printer she wanted to use, when a *Country Living* event at the Hay Festival provided the final incentive. Inspired by hearing vintage homeware designer Julie Dodsworth and Fiona Davies of Women in Rural Enterprise talk about turning a hobby into a business, Alison took her sketches to the Anstey Wallpaper Company, which has been printing papers for more than 100 years (for companies including Colefax and Fowler and Osborne & Little). By September she was watching the first rolls of her 'Dummer Rose' paper coming off the press at its Leicestershire printworks.

Everyone at Anstey was enthusiastic about her designs from the start, she remembers, which was a huge confidence boost: "And my moodboards helped them understand the look I was after. I gave ➡





SHE WANTS THE BUSINESS TO GROW AT ITS OWN PACE, TO PAY BACK START-UP COSTS



them fabric scraps and flowers to colour-match – and even a picture of a lovely old Massey Ferguson tractor, which was the perfect grey for my rabbits and rocking horse.” Anstey had designers, colour mixers and printers who could take her raw sketches and turn them into a pattern that would be checked and adjusted by her at each stage of the process. “Once we’d agreed on the rose shape, they sent roughs in different sizes for me to decide on the scale, then fitted that mathematically into the paper width, and got the colours how I wanted them,” she explains.

KEEPING EXPENSES DOWN

Each colour needed a different roller, at a cost of more than £500 each, but Alison and her husband Ian funded the project out of savings, and ordered the minimum quantity (150 rolls) of each design to keep

the expense down. Most of her customers buy just two or three rolls at a time, but she’s also found a company that can turn her papers into beautiful ribbon-tied box files, getting six out of a single roll, so she will keep a stock of those, too.

She wants to let Cowparsley grow at its own pace, in order to pay back the start-up costs, while also keeping the concept undiluted and enjoying the sense of achievement she feels in bringing something new to life. She has now turned her bees into a fabric, too – along with a scaled-down version of the rose (called ‘Audrey’, after her mother), printed on a linen-cotton mix in softer colours: “How lucky am I to be earning an income from what I love!” she says.

i *Cowparsley at Home (01460 261963; cowparsleyathome.com). Wallpapers start from £45/10.5 metres.*



Q&A

ALISON PORTER, COWPARSLEY AT HOME

What do you wish you'd known before starting?

How much admin is involved and the importance of having delivery options in place.

Did yours seem like a realistic business idea when you first thought of it?

It felt more like a dream.

I lacked confidence but took great encouragement from reading about other women who had turned their idea into a business, regardless of how old they were. I don't think age should ever be viewed as a barrier to starting something new.

When you launched, what was your goal?

To work for myself creating beautiful designs that I loved and would use in my own home – with the hope that others would want the same.

Have you made any sacrifices?

Yes, holidays. We have made a large financial investment in the business and until we have paid this back, time away will have to wait.

What has been your biggest challenge?

Keeping on top of PR and making people aware of the business.

How did you overcome any difficulties?

I've had wonderful support from many others in the business who have



"I HAVE BEEN AMAZED
AT THE INCREDIBLE
MANUFACTURING
COMPANIES WE HAVE
IN THIS COUNTRY"

encouraged me and given me confidence.

What have you learned about the industry since starting?

I have been amazed at the incredible manufacturing companies we have in this country and the way the wallpaper business continues

to evolve while maintaining the use of traditional techniques.

Did you use any basic budgeting techniques?

To keep the costs down we used a small website company that charged a reasonable rate, and ordered the minimum number of wallpaper rolls for each design.

What is your proudest moment so far?

Seeing the first rolls of wallpaper come off the production line. I found it rather moving, as it made the whole business seem real.

Are there any advantages to being based at home?

Yes, not having to get in my car each morning, being able to take my coffee out to my studio, light my woodburner and have the radio and dogs for company. However, it can be lonely not having someone else to bounce ideas off.

How do you make your company stand out from the crowd?

By ensuring the Cowparsley brand is as original as possible. All my designs have an authentic charm and lasting relevance. I don't follow trends and do only what I love.

What is the best advice you've been given?

Grow the brand at your own pace and stay true to yourself.

WORDS FROM THE WISE



Julie Dodsworth, homeware designer and business founder

“Being paid a reasonable price for your hard work is the basis of all business. Give some thought to what is ‘reasonable’ and don’t under-sell yourself.”

juliedodsworth.com



SPARE-TIME START-UP

WORKING AROUND EXISTING COMMITMENTS

PREPARE ARTISAN
FOOD

FACT FILE

NAME Zoë Denham**AGE** 47**LIVES IN** Diss, Norfolk**SPECIALISES IN**

Artisan food from

East Anglia

01379 643303; [bigskies
foodcompany.com](http://bigskiesfoodcompany.com))

WHEN HER TEENAGE son was involved in a sporting accident and required home care, Zoë was forced to give up her job in retail to temporarily look after him 24 hours a day: "Sam couldn't eat solid foods, so I promised to make him a hearty pie when he was feeling better," she recalls. "I wanted it to be extra special, so researched local producers who could supply high-quality meat and vegetables."

Over the next six months, with the help of her partner Mark, Zoë refined her flavour combinations, and then created other dishes, such as Norfolk Lavender Cheesecake, as she gained confidence. In 2011, after food safety checks, she began selling to the public, focusing on attracting people with an interest in traceable, handmade food: "Winning regional awards was a turning point because the media coverage was great free publicity."

In response to customer demand, Zoë shifted the emphasis of her product range

from freshly prepared ready meals to naturally gluten-free food gifts and treats that feature artisan ingredients from East Anglia. Her collection now includes toffee brittle made using sugar produced in Suffolk and quinoa cultivated in Essex. "The business changed following a 'meet the buyer' event in 2014 where there was the chance to talk to food retailers looking for local produce," she says.

This experience taught Zoë the importance of being adaptable and determined: "Your first idea may not be your best – it's essential to listen to customers and provide them with what they want. It might be that the business changes from the original plan, but being flexible is a real strength as a small enterprise." Since then, the number of Big Skies Food Company stockists has increased and Zoë proudly supplies Sandringham Estate, local National Trust venues and the East of England Co-Op, among other outlets.





TIP

Sample food by some of the country's finest producers at regional events such as the Ludlow Food Festival (foodfestival.co.uk) and Aldeburgh Food & Drink Festival (aldeburghfoodanddrink.co.uk). Discover more at foodfestivalfinder.co.uk.

ENTERPRISING WAYS TO USE YOUR TIME

10
MINS

Source fresh ingredients

Stock up at your nearest wholesale market, which often takes place late at night or in the early hours of the morning - it's a great place to pick up top-quality items at low prices.

30
MINS

Do your research

Your kitchen, recipes, labelling and packaging must all comply with strict regulations, and you'll require insurance to sell to the public. Don't get caught out: read up on what's necessary before starting up. The Food Standards Agency (food.gov.uk) and Health and Safety Executive (hse.gov.uk) both have useful guidelines.

60+
MINS

Get cooking

Prepare batches of your products and hand out samples (and business cards) at locations where people might be most in need of them - target hungry commuters at busy train stations, health-conscious parents at the school gate and holidaymakers in tourist hotspots.

ZOE'S SPARE-TIME START-UP TIP: test the market rigorously, trying every possible angle, including friends, a market stall and free samples in exchange for feedback. This will help determine whether there is a place for your item or service and if you can make enough money for your lifestyle.



THE COLLECTOR

SHOP OF DELIGHTS

With virtually no budget, Hannah Burson opened an emporium in Hay-on-Wye, selling the vintage items she unearths at auctions and markets, and creating a hub where other local businesses can also thrive

WORDS BY KITTY CORRIGAN • PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALUN CALLENDER






At the age of 14, Hannah Burson was taken out of school one afternoon by her mother to experience the thrill of the chase at auction, where they started bidding for light fittings and vintage furniture. It was the beginning of a lifelong passion for collecting. So in 2012 when she moved with three young children from a large house to a small cottage just outside Hay-on-Wye, she needed to de-clutter and make money from the myriad items she had amassed over the years – opening a vintage store in the Welsh book town proved the perfect solution.

The fascinating emporium comprises seemingly random objects that work together as an artistic whole. Red ice-skates in a Victorian glass cabinet sit next to sheet music from the Forties that rests on an architect's plan chest, while a retro orange TV set looks homely on a Formica coffee table and a heavy-duty bicycle leans against a battered wooden dresser displaying WWII helmets, model

cars and framed book covers. "I've never been able to resist a bargain," Hannah says, pointing to one of her favourite acquisitions hanging inside the door: an enormous chandelier found in a barn and bought as part of a pair for £10. Lighting is an obsession: old coloured bulbs, brass and nickel lampholders and large industrial shades fill the store.

The shop building was originally a large hotel and just before the Hay Festival in 2014, when tens of thousands of people descended for ten days of literary events, the ground floor became available for rent. Others might have been daunted by the shabby state of the interior, but Hannah saw the potential of large open spaces, alcoves and anterooms, and set to work with her friend and like-minded entrepreneur Lucy Jardine, scrubbing and painting for four days round the clock to open in time for the deluge. "We made enough money during the festival to see us through the winter months," she



The image shows a room filled with various objects and furniture. In the foreground, there's a white desk with a lamp, a green vase with flowers, and a small round yellow table with a white vase. In the background, there's a wooden desk with a mirror above it, a chandelier, and several hanging lamps. The room has a rustic, creative feel with many items on display.

"I WANTED IT TO BE A
CREATIVE ARTS AREA
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recalls. Hannah knows about hard work: she got her first job at 17 as a horse groom and children's nanny in Cornwall and later trained as a business agent in the Home Counties when she learned how to sell. She settled in Hay-on-Wye with Silas, seven, and Griffin, five, and ran her own photography company, then – while caring for Gwyneth, three – tried out the idea of selling vintage items at a pop-up store in the old South Wales Electricity building, which people referred to as 'the old electric shop', so she kept the name when she moved to the new premises: "I only had a few hundred pounds to start with and often juggled with the rent money to buy something I felt I 'had to have', then scrambled to sell another piece fast. Not recommended!"

To cover the lease on the property, she offered concessions to other small enterprises, including Llynfi Textiles, which sells Welsh woollen clothing, Katie Tyler's upholstery services and

Barnabees Books, which specialises in classic Penguins and Ladybirds. There is also a good-as-new designer clothes section run by Lucy, who has just become Hannah's business partner and whose eldest child, Bluebelle, 20, handles the accounts and admin. Each section happens to be run by a woman, with 17 children between them, many of whom enjoy their turn on the one item in the shop not for sale – a rocking horse made by Hannah's grandfather.

A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT

This arrangement helps the entrepreneurs with their many commitments, as they sell stock on each other's behalf if needed: "Everyone contributes their individual talent, and working together gives us a chance to build up online sales. There's a real sense of community whereas when operating alone you can sometimes doubt yourself." By collaborating with other enterprises, Hannah has made



The Old Electric Shop a destination in itself. "I wanted it to be a creative arts area, where people would linger over a coffee or lunch, and hopefully buy," she says. The recent addition of a café has achieved this result. Gwen Goddard produces seasonal soups, stews, pizzas, salads and homemade cakes, while regular cocktail evenings attract custom and create a buzz. A huge oak bench is the setting for Speed Chess on Sunday afternoons, there is a gallery space for temporary exhibitions, and Wednesdays in term time sees illustrator Lizzie Harper running a children's workshop.

Being part of a team also allows Hannah to go out seeking eccentric and vintage items from scrap merchants, salvage yards, auctions, car boot sales and dealers: "There are some great characters in the Welsh hills." The most unusual item she has bought

recently is a prosthetic arm with leather strapping, which she had no trouble selling. "I don't collect anything for me these days, just for the shop, and what I can't resist are pieces with an industrial or commercial history such as old shop fittings and factory furniture," she says, as she unveils the goods she found on her recent trip to Birmingham, which include a factory clock, a hairdresser's mirror and a bench that once belonged to a railway station. Sizing them up, she decides where each will fit in her fascinating emporium, not that they are likely to be there for long – soon they'll be bringing a quirky touch and an interesting back story to the homes of her increasingly devoted customers.

i *The Old Electric Shop, 10 Broad Street, Hay-on-Wye, Herefordshire (01497 821194; oldelectric.co.uk).*



Q&A

HANNAH BURSON, THE OLD ELECTRIC SHOP

What do you wish you'd known before starting?

As the shop became busier, trying to do everything myself was too hard. Having someone to work on the accounts for one day a week was like having a massive weight lifted off my shoulders.

Any tips for keeping on top of finances?

I haven't yet borrowed any money. I started with just enough cash to pay the rent, and then re-invested the takings to improve the shop, start the café and expand the stock. I'm not even comfortable with using an overdraft.

When you first started, what was your goal?

I wanted to offer a dynamic creative hub in which people could come together to make a great space that would entice customers and keep them coming back.

How do you compete with larger retailers?

Independent shops have atmosphere and character that just can't be recreated by a chain or big store. We are so connected to what we sell and are passionate about creating somewhere people want to explore. Our regulars know there is always something new to be found here.

What do you do to make your company stand out?

I buy things I like myself and



"HAVING SOMEONE
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we style it in the shop to make it look good. You have to follow your instincts.

How did you cope with all the essential admin?

By working every day and in the evening when the children were in bed. A lot of balls were being dropped until I employed someone to help me and now everything is smoother.

Do you advertise?

We are pretty good on social media, and take photos of our stock, but don't do any print marketing. In a small town, word of mouth is always the best, so if we're running an event we tell everyone we see.

The best thing about having your own business?

I don't respond well to being told what to do, so working for myself and not having a boss is great. As a single parent, the flexibility of running my own business means I can juggle time with family and time at work.

What has surprised you along the way?

Just how pleased people have been to discover a place like ours in a small town and to become a part of it. I love that we have customers who come in for a drink and a chat.

What have you learned about the industry?

Building up a network of really good suppliers is vital.

Did you use any basic budgeting techniques?

I had a tin of cash, which I used to pay for everything and put all the takings in. We're not much more sophisticated now, although I have a 1950s till that makes a great sound.

What was the best decision you made?

To see the potential in a large space that had been empty for three years.

Do you have any advice for others just starting out?

Be organised, but go with the flow. Don't be afraid of having a strong vision and be brave. Believe that you can make it work and do what you need to in order to achieve that.

Setting up a shop

Buying online can never really replace shopping in store – the chance to see and feel the goods, the passion of the shopkeeper and the sensation of leaving with a unique item and a story to tell. With around 280,000 shops in the UK, the retail experience is very much alive and kicking



WORDS BY FIONA DAVIES BUSINESS MANAGER, WOMEN IN RURAL ENTERPRISE (WIREUK.ORG)

LITTLE SHOP OF TREASURES

- Depending on the goods you will be offering, consider a range of room themes to make it easy for your customers to buy. Haphazard arrangements can be confusing and may lead to fewer sales.

- Appeal to all potential buyers. Offer a variety of products that will fit in different types of homes, wardrobes and gardens. Scatter around smaller, cheaper items.

- Let your passion do the selling and give customers information about the item they are purchasing – they will be more likely to return and to recommend you.

- If you have the space, provide additional experiences such as workshops, taster sessions and the opportunity to enjoy other local skills and services. They don't even have to complement each other – how delightful to have a reiki massage and buy a homemade mug on the same visit.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

- If your store is based in the countryside, without the advantage of high-street footfall, you need to attract customers who are willing



to combine a day out with a stopping-off point – it's called destination shopping. Customers won't naturally find you at first, so concentrate your marketing activities on social media, such as blogs and e-newsletters. (Once you have a good reputation, people will seek you out regardless.)

- Consider working with local tourist attractions and accommodation providers to

cross-promote and try to build a community around your shop, encouraging locals to use your facilities and spread the word.

- Make sure you can be easily located via clear road signage that complies with local authority regulations.

KEEPING IT LEGAL

- Speak to an insurance broker; you will need Public Liability Insurance and some product/premises protection.

- Even homemade products (yours and others') must comply with government safety legislation. Your local authority should be able to help make sure you have all the legalities in place.

THE ART OF SELLING

- Providing customer satisfaction is important for all kinds of shops. Your packaging should be branded appropriately (a stamped brown paper bag for a store offering rustic homeware, perhaps) and convey the idea that you offer a reliable delivery service for larger items, if appropriate.

- Make your terms and conditions clear. When selling second-hand goods, ensure people are aware that they are

buying items 'sold as seen'. This can be turned into a positive message about your stock's character and authenticity.

DRUM UP BUSINESS

- When trade is slow, why not organise events? If you sell clothing, perhaps a fashion evening with out-of-hours browsing; a clear-out-your-attic day could work well for a vintage store; or, for a bookshop, you could arrange for authors to give talks.

- It pays to regularly audit your stock – anything sitting around for too long will cost you money. In an antiques shop, for instance, a hidden item may suddenly be in vogue and could need re-pricing or relocating.

SOURCEBOOK

Small Business Saturday – *a celebration of local enterprises in the UK* (smallbusinessaturdayuk.com)

British Independent Retailers Association – *trade body providing support and services* (bira.co.uk)

Rural Shops Alliance – *for owners of independent rural shops* (ruralshops.org.uk)

GIVE CUSTOMERS
INFORMATION ABOUT
THE ITEM THEY ARE
PURCHASING

SEW • COOK • WRITE • DRAW • MAKE • GROW



CREATING THE
perfect
WORKING
ENVIRONMENT



Creating the perfect working environment

Find a space and make it your own – no matter how small it is, you'll be happier and more productive if you love your work area

WORDS BY FIONA DAVIES

CHOOSING YOUR HQ

- Take a good hard look at your home and how it is used. Pinpoint an underused room, a space under the stairs or even an empty corner.
- Garages, sheds and other outdoor rooms work well and give a real sense of separation; but be practical – electricity, broadband and weather considerations might mean they are less attractive than being inside.
- You'll achieve a much better work-life balance if you can shut the door on the place where you run your business. Alternatively, use a foldaway desk, a screen or room divider.
- For maximum efficiency, make sure there is enough room for all your office paraphernalia.
- Keep your workspace free of distractions – if the ironing basket is next to your desk, it's going to be hard to concentrate.
- Decorate the area to your taste and to distinguish between work and home. It should be well-lit – plenty of daylight is the optimum;



alternatively, use a good natural-light lamp.

- Give yourself space for creative scribbling – at your desk or against the wall.

SETTING UP WITH TECHNOLOGY

As the main tool of your trade, your computer needs to be fit for the job. It must have enough memory, devices and the right software (see Directory for the best business productivity tools). A laptop with a docking station (a hardware device that makes the connection of peripherals, such as a printer, easier), monitor, keyboard and mouse is a good choice; it's portable but comfortable to use for long periods. And if your internet connection is reasonable, consider a Chromebook – it is similar to a laptop, but lighter and simpler, with all your information stored on the Cloud. Tablets and smartphones are great for catching up with email and managing social media on the move. Cloud storage

ENTERPRISING WAYS TO USE YOUR TIME

- 10 MINS** Get comfortable with video conference calling. A quick face-to-face conversation to discuss a problem will make you feel less isolated.
- 30 MINS** Leave your desk and take some thinking time, do some yoga or go for a walk. It will give you a different perspective.
- 60+ MINS** Write a blog; your work environment is part of your business, so share it. If clients are engaged with you, the sale will be much easier.

*You'll be joining the
2.9 million home-based
businesses in the
UK that contribute
£300 million to the
economy, according to
government campaign
Britain is Great*

has revolutionised small businesses. It means that you can access your files anywhere with an internet connection, on whatever device you happen to have to hand. It is also possible to share documents or folders, which makes collaboration with a virtual team easy. Files are potentially at risk of being stolen or read, but most well-known services hold them using encryption and a secure layer to transport them.

You should consider broadband speed. Most home offices can manage with a domestic connection – if you're able to watch YouTube videos, it will probably be fast enough. However, if posting video or numerous images, check the speed and whether superfast (fibre) broadband or a cable connection is available by consulting websites such as broadbandspeedchecker.co.uk.

BRICKS AND MORTAR

Find out about planning permission. You may need change of use consent if:

- Your home will no longer be mainly a private residence (a B&B, for example, in which you use only one or two rooms to live in)
- There is a major rise in traffic or people coming and going (activities, shop or nursery)
- Your business will disturb the neighbours or create other forms of nuisance (such as cooking smells or noise)

INSURANCE

Check whether you require insurance. If you come into contact with members of the public you must take out public liability insurance. This protects against any claims resulting from injury or harm to property. Material damage cover safeguards your physical location, stock, any business interruption and goods in transit. Professional Indemnity Insurance provides cover if any advice or professional knowledge your enterprise imparts results in a claim from a client due to lost income/reputation.

SEW • COOK • WRITE • DRAW • MAKE • GROW



CASE STUDY: WORKING FROM HOME

When Nicola Rust started her own design company, she couldn't find room to be creative indoors so looked to the garden instead. She even called her enterprise In The Shed (in-theshed.co.uk). "On hearing my business name, clients always ask, 'Are you actually in a shed?'" Nicola says. "When I reply, 'Yes', they are immediately engaged and interested – it sets me apart from the competition. The shed has become my greatest business asset." The structure in question is a second-hand bargain and measures just 3 x 3.6 metres. It is now fully insulated, and equipped with power sockets and lights (no planning permission required). Nicola picks up WiFi from the house and uses a mobile phone, the shed is decorated in soothing colours with upcycled furniture and usually includes Boo and Woody, her canine partners.

THE ARTIST

DRAWING ON TRADITION

From a stunning top-floor studio with far-reaching views of the surrounding countryside, this Sussex painter earns a living creating nostalgic images of rural Britain

WORDS BY CATHERINE BUTLER ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRIS TERRY

Kelly Hall's lucky paintbrush is going a little bald. "I don't know what I'm going to do because I don't think they make this style anymore," she says, frowning down at it. It's hardly surprising it is looking a bit thin because, since the launch of Kelly Hall Designs in 2011, it has swept the length and breadth of the British Isles – from the chalk cliffs and pleasure piers of the south coast up to the verdant Scottish glens, and from the colourful beach huts of East Anglia across to the snow-capped mountains of Wales, not to mention the short splash across the water to Ireland. In fact, Kelly has now showcased more than 20 of Britain's most iconic locations in her vintage

railway-inspired posters. Her latest design features the Oxfordshire Wittenham Clumps, the oldest beech tree crowns in Britain. "I try to choose iconic landmarks that sum up the beauty of a particular area, and then paint them in a way that captures a feeling and triggers memories of a place," says Kelly, taking a pipette and rehydrating the drying gouache paint on her palette with a little water. Her paper is taped taut to her drawing board, and she has drawn a small sun in the top right-hand corner to remind her where the light is coming from. Along the edge of the board she has jotted notes on the flora and fauna she wants to add; red kites are at the top of today's list: "I like my work to have a

certain level of authenticity, so I make sure the foliage and wildlife is right for the region and the season. I've even researched which breeds of animals farmers are grazing in local fields."

Summer sun pours through the six skylights of Kelly's attic studio, providing not only fantastic natural light to work in, but also spectacular views of her home town of Lewes and the Sussex Downs beyond. Although it's a challenge to clean, Kelly deliberately opted for an all-white finish for her studio because she needed it to be bright to keep her colours true. But this blank canvas of a room is also the perfect backdrop for Kelly's carefully curated collection of retro British ephemera, from which she constantly ➔





draws inspiration. Shelves are lined with vintage books, old maps and Devon Blue pottery, as well as seed heads and pine cones foraged on morning walks with Pebble, her cocker spaniel.

The daughter of a photographer and a lecturer in fine art and print-making, Kelly studied graphic design and illustration at Central St Martins, like her two older brothers before her. In the early days of her career, she helped create shop-window displays and was even part of a model-making team for the film *101 Dalmatians*, but in 2006 when she and her husband Andrew, a university lecturer, decided to move to Lewes with their two daughters, Taylor, now 13, and Robin, 11, she had been working in the Learning department of The Design Museum in London for six years.

"I commuted for a while, but it got too much for me," says Kelly, who decided to

"I WANTED TO DO
SOMETHING THAT
CELEBRATED BRITAIN AND
ITS HERITAGE, AND HAD
A SENSE OF PLACE"



return to her creative roots. "I wanted to do something that celebrated Britain and its heritage and had a sense of place, so it felt natural to start with the area around our new home." Finding inspiration in vintage graphic art, Kelly had always been drawn to the work of Abram Games, the man behind the timeless design of the 1951 Festival of Britain souvenirs, and the posters of Frank Newbould and Eric Ravilious. This led her to look at the souvenir offerings on her doorstep and, finding that it largely consisted of gimmicky keyrings, she wondered if there was a market for something new. Inspired by the colour palettes and techniques of these mid-20th-century artists, she decided to recreate vintage railway posters for modern Britain, starting with her new home town. She made some rough drafts of a couple of designs, and contacted the buyer at





Lewes's Tourism Office to see if there was any interest.

"She loved them," says Kelly, who immediately received an order for greetings cards, tea towels, mugs and lavender bags in both designs. The first design was painted in tones of Wedgwood china blue, while the second used the fresh 'sunny day tones' that have since become her signature style. "Some of the colours used in the old posters were quite muddy – beige and khaki – so I have updated the palette," she explains. "My water has more turquoise in it, or a roof might be painted pink."

GETTING NEW IDEAS

Kelly starts by making a rough pencil outline, which she then loosely paints using gouache: "I use a lot of artistic licence to sum up an area. My Brighton poster, for example, is from a seagull's point of view." She visits as many places as she can with her sketchbook, but as

she has a young family it's not always possible, so she also uses Google Earth and historical photos for reference: "I like to juxtapose the old with the new."

Recently, Kelly has also begun to explore other ways of celebrating Britain's history, culture and heritage. Her Vintage British Kitchen collection is a series of seven paintings so far, showcasing everything from the seafood of the British Isles to its artisan cheeses, puddings and pies. She loves the research as much as the actual painting, and the RHS Lindley Library, the V&A and the Natural History Museum are some of her favourite sources of reference. In fact, ideas seem to be everywhere. She has also recently taken an allotment in the nearby village of Firle: "I've planted fruit trees, and I'm busy growing beautiful and unusual varieties of pumpkin, squash, courgette, artichoke and fennel." She is also planning on growing traditional kitchen garden flowers and native flowers to

help the South Downs wildlife flourish. She hopes the plot will provide delicious produce for her family to enjoy, as well as inspiration for new art collections to draw and paint.

And it seems the appeal of her art collections is growing as quickly as her subject matter, with luxury department store Liberty stocking her vintage railway and kitchen cards, John Lewis selling her prints, and Ulster Weavers using her designs on a range of tableware. "I think it's the nostalgia," Kelly says. "I encourage potential customers to share the stories of places they have particularly enjoyed visiting or the recipes they remember from their childhood. I love it when I paint something and someone says, 'Oh, I used to go on holiday there as a child.' It's wonderful to be able to stir people's memories."

For more on Kelly's products and collections, visit kellyhalldesigns.com.



"I USE A LOT OF ARTISTIC LICENCE – MY BRIGHTON POSTER IS FROM A SEAGULL'S POINT OF VIEW"



Q&A

KELLY HALL, KELLY HALL DESIGNS.

Is there anything you wish you'd known before starting?

Yes, that being creative is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to launching and building a successful business. In addition, I've had to acquire new skills, from marketing, project management and stock control to finance, customer care and dealing with social media.

How do you compete with large retailers?

I can't really, so I believe in working with them – licensing artwork to manufacturers that supply my designs to big stores, which in turn gives me great exposure. It's also important to offer something unique. Each of the prints I sell through my website are individually hand-signed so, along with the personal service I offer, customers get value through buying directly from the artist.

In what ways do you make your company stand out?

From day one, I've had a simple identity, including logo, letterhead, business cards and compliment slips. This has been applied to my packaging, website and social media accounts, too. I also do my best to respond as quickly as possible to any queries.

The best thing about being your own boss?

I feel very lucky to be in control of my creative path. The



"I FIND HAVING
A SEPARATE
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A DOOR YOU CAN
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combination of research, drawing, painting, travel and working with talented partners is a constant pleasure. Setting up a business has given my creativity a real framework. I picture it a little like planting a climbing rose in some good soil, with trellising, against a sunny wall on which to grow.

What do you like best about your working environment?

I'm fortunate to have a light, airy, top-floor studio in our house. It's completely white and we've nicknamed it The Skylounge. This is a lovely, peaceful space in which to work with great views. All I

can hear is birdsong and the occasional biplane buzzing around over the South Downs.

What are the essential components of a productive workspace?

As many small businesses do, mine started out at the kitchen table. Later we took the plunge and had a studio built on the top of our family home. I find having a separate workspace, with a door you can close, absolutely invaluable. I can shut myself off from the daily hubbub of family life – as well as escape from work. It's also a treat to have enough room to leave out pictures in progress, rather than packing it all up at the end of each day.

Do you have a workday ritual?

Each morning before I start in my studio, I walk on the South Downs with Pebble, my cocker spaniel. I use this time to figure out my ideas for new collections, compositions and colour schemes. I also make mental lists of the jobs that I need to prioritise.

What advice would you give to others just starting out?

Thoroughly research your market by visiting trade shows and exhibitions such as Top Drawer and the *Country Living* Fairs. Read as much as you can on launching a start-up. Write a business plan and, as your idea takes shape, work on your elevator pitch.

WORDS FROM THE WISE



**Alastair Sawday, founder,
Sawday's**

"I have always tried to make my office as un-office-like as possible. You would probably prefer to spend your time at home, so why not make it a bit like home? So I have my desks made from recycled timber by local craftsmen; it may cost more but it gives a sense of solidity and feels good. I use rugs and carpets, interesting paintings or photos, old furniture such as Georgian corner cupboards and chests of drawers (they are now ridiculously cheap and can look very handsome). Apple-packing cases serve as book shelves and space-dividers. A grim reception desk has been transformed by nailing strips of timber to the front and we try to hide ugly computer kit. The latest touch at our workspaces in Bristol is a Bechstein grand piano, which staff are encouraged to play after working hours." *sawdays.co.uk*

SPARE-TIME START-UP

WORKING AROUND EXISTING COMMITMENTS

LAUNCH A POP-UP
CAFE

FACT FILE

NAME Jules Thomas**AGE** 54**LIVES IN** Somerton,
Oxfordshire**SPECIALISES IN**Home-cooked pop-up
dining (theseecretsupper.com)

ASPARAGUS MOUSSE, confit duck, and rhubarb and custard terrine, all made using local and home-grown ingredients – when it comes to excellent food with a personal touch, Jules Thomas's pop-up restaurant, run from the family farmhouse with views of the Cherwell Valley, ticks all the boxes.

Jules was a full-time mother when she came up with the idea for relaxed yet elegant dining experiences in 2009. "I invited ten friends round on a trial basis and asked them to spread the word about my new venture," she says. She now runs 28 events per year – at which her husband Nick is head waiter – catering for up to 24 guests, who she seats around several cloth-covered, extendable garden tables ("they were cheaper"). "Nick has been hugely supportive of the business," Jules says. "He used to commute to London, but is now based at home so he can help with the children while I prepare for a booking."

Each five-course meal can take an entire week to prepare, fitted in around

a three-hour daily school run, and is made using only a single domestic oven and four-ring hob. "I had all the necessary health-and-safety checks early on, and took out public liability insurance, too," she says. "Guests bring their own wine – you don't need a licence for that." Jules has developed a network of growers and artisans from whom she sources fresh produce for her seasonal dishes. She puts the success of her venture partly down to recommendations: "Word of mouth has been so important for my business. Social media channels – especially Facebook and Instagram – are a great form of this and generate around 70 per cent of my bookings."

Jules now plans to introduce themed nights based on cuisine from around the world – Spanish and Persian being of particular interest. So, what does she like best about her business? "I love seeing people enjoy my food and the biggest compliment is that they keep coming back."





TIP

Discover secret eateries in your area and enjoy the pop-up experience yourself; visit supperclubfangroup.ning.com for details of those taking place around the country.

ENTERPRISING WAYS TO USE YOUR TIME

10
MINS

Create a buzz

Footfall for a living-room café or restaurant is likely to be less than a high-street eaterie, so inventive marketing will be vital for getting your business known. Social media, leafletting and the local press are low-cost starting points. But think of ways to make your offering memorable such as a 1920s-style dinner party or Alice in Wonderland-themed tea.

30
MINS

Get insurance

Even though you will be serving fresh food at home, you still need public liability insurance and a food hygiene certificate. Find out more about what is required and how to arrange a free kitchen inspection from an environmental health officer at food.gov.uk.

60
MINS

Head outside

Organise a branded pop-up picnic with some friends to grab the attention of passers-by. Hand out fliers, plus free coffee and cake to tempt them in.

JULES'S SPARE-TIME START-UP TIP: begin with a small, easily achieved offering and you won't put too much pressure on yourself. When I launched, I provided Friday-night dinners only – this fitted in well with my family because work didn't encroach on the weekend. As our children have grown up, I've been able to run events more frequently.

SHOWING HER METAL

A move to the countryside and a desire to work from home inspired one woman to return to her original trade and launch a venture crafting collections of beautiful silver jewellery

WORDS BY CAROLINE WHEATER ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALUN CALLENDER



On a warm summer's day, the door and windows of Alice Robson's shepherd's-hut-style studio in Sussex are thrown open to catch the breeze. Sitting at her workbench, Alice concentrates hard as she files a silver ring so that its surface is smooth to the touch. Next to her is a little pile of laser-cut silver shapes that she will make into her signature Pod pendants and earrings later that day. These are just two of the many tasks she has to fit in between the hours of 10am and 4pm when her children, Fergus, 16, and Edie, 14, are at school.

"I've always wanted to do this business around my family - I'm a hands-on mum and I want to be there for them when they come home from school," she explains, as she snatches a tea break on a sunshine-yellow wooden bench on the terrace outside her garden studio. "I only do fairs that are local or easily accessible to me, usually in Kent, Sussex and London. But I do have ambitions - I would love to get into the Goldsmiths' Fair in the City. I'll keep applying until I crack it," she says, with an air of cheery determination.

Alice, 48, set up her jewellery business in 2005, after casting around for a job she could combine well with life at home. She had learnt jewellery design some 20 years ➡





earlier at Central Saint Martins before practising it for a short time with high-fashion jewellers Dinny Hall, then John Donald. This was followed by a stint travelling in Asia for 14 months. "When I returned to the UK in 1993, I needed a salary, quick, and I got a job as a receptionist at a start-up telecoms company," she explains. "There were lots of opportunities and I was soon offered a role in sales, rising to become an account manager." She continued working in this world until 2002 when she and her architect husband James moved to the country with two-year-old Fergus shortly before the birth of Edie.

THE TURNING POINT

Throughout her time in the telecoms industry, Alice kept her metre-wide workbench and made a few little things, but by 2005 the idea of returning to her trade as a jeweller had taken root: "I made a tiny silver box for a godson's christening and that was the turning point. It felt rewarding to do something I really enjoyed – I'd never felt entirely comfortable in sales. As a mum I had become much more self-assured about my own taste and style, and knew I could cope with unexpected challenges."

Alice and James had savings of around £15,000 following the sale of their property in London and they used this to set up the



fledgling business. Alice's plan was to make her original designs, offer a re-making service for old or inherited pieces, and teach others jewellery making. Having a separate studio to do it all in was essential and James designed the cedar-clad garden building to Alice's specifications, with plenty of windows for natural light, a woodburner to keep the space warm in winter, and four workbenches for students. "I wanted it to be an inspirational place," she says. She shopped cannily for equipment and materials, buying a job lot of specialist tools for £100 from the son of a family friend, and making additional purchases at Cooksongold and HS Walsh in Hatton Garden.

While the studio was being built, Alice was already designing her own jewellery – one of the earliest ranges was the Beaded collection, which remains the most popular, and has since been joined by the subtly textured Pebble, Pod and Flint collections. "My pieces are all ➡

"I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO DO THIS BUSINESS AROUND MY FAMILY"







"MY PIECES ARE ALL INFLUENCED BY THE ORGANIC SHAPES OF NATURE"

influenced by the organic shapes of nature – they are not an exact replica but more of an interpretation along simple lines," she says. "I love mid-century-modern furniture and interior design, too, and one of my greatest inspirations is Lucienne Day and her repeat pattern fabrics from the 1950s such as Calyx and Flotilla."

WIDENING THE NETWORK

By 2007, with the studio finished, she was able to teach students for one-and-a-half days a week. "My turnover doubled in a year," she recalls. "Some people booked for a term, others ended up coming for two years or more." Not only did the students bring in valuable income, they also bought pieces of Alice's jewellery for themselves, recommended her to friends and generally widened her network of contacts. "Everything I earned from the teaching, I ploughed back into the business," she says.

Alice has a realistic attitude to her business, and thinks about making pieces

accessible and affordable. "There's always a battle between what I would like to make and what will sell. My customers want jewellery that is wearable and comfortable. They might buy a pair of £35 earrings for themselves at a fair, but their husbands will then buy the matching necklace for £150 as a birthday present." Attending fairs is also an important part of Alice's business and she spends at least ten weekends a year selling at craft shows. She launched her website in autumn 2014 and has noticed an increasing number of sales coming through it. "First it was a support mechanism for the fairs, but now it is a selling tool." She also updates her Facebook and Instagram pages every few days, seeing them as a way to stay in contact with her customers.

Alice enjoys being her own boss and the ebb and flow of her trade – at busy times, such as the run-up to Christmas, she will be making more than 30 pieces a week. "I constantly review what I do. Part of being a designer is never standing still, to always be growing and moving on." This is an attitude that has paid off – when she started out, she set herself the aim of earning £20,000 working part-time – it's a goal that she has achieved and surpassed and, based on her sales figures, this could only be the beginning.

i For more about Alice's jewellery, visit alicerobson.co.uk.





Q&A

ALICE ROBSON, ALICE ROBSON JEWELLERY

Where do you get your inspiration?

Originally, most of my ideas came from nature, but more recently a love of mid-century design and naturally occurring geometries have influenced my work, too.

What do you wish you'd known before starting?

Hard work, determination and a little bit of flair is all you need to be successful. Things won't always go your way but that makes the triumphs even more rewarding.

When you first started, what was your goal?

I always have a few challenging but achievable aims. The first was designing and making my collection, then getting into a particular fair, then earning £10k and so forth.

How have you overcome any difficulties?

I've met some amazing people in the jewellery world who are very supportive. If I'm having a problem or dealing with a challenging client, I've learned not to react immediately, sleep on it and review it again in the morning. I am often surprised by how much clearer matters appear to be the next day.

In what ways do you make your company stand out?

I never let anything out of the studio that I'm not proud of. I've often made items twice if they're not perfect. Your



"SHOW YOUR WORK
OFF AS BEST AS YOU
CAN – PEOPLE
UNDERVALUE HOW
VITAL THIS ASPECT
OF SELLING IS"

customers will return again if they think the design and quality are really good. I also want to make very wearable jewellery, so always design my pieces with this in mind.

What has been your best decision?

Building the studio – it changed my business overnight.

What is your favourite thing about your workspace?

I love my studio and all the inspirational pieces I've put inside it. There is nothing better than having the door open when the sun is shining. In the summer, I enjoy looking out at the cosmos growing in

the raised bed and being in close proximity to the elements.

How do you create that environment?

I fill it with things I love, such as postcards of paintings. I'm also constantly revamping my display area. It's important that you show your work off as best you can – people undervalue how vital this aspect of selling is.

What are the components of a productive workspace?

I am a little disorganised at times, so I find that a clear-up and sort out once a week is a good idea. One book for orders, clearly marked drawers and containers for all my materials help me stay on top of things.

What is your workday ritual?

I'll check emails and create a post on social media, then walk the dog with friends. Next, I make and package up orders or work on developing new ideas. I'll have a cup of tea and a chat with my children when they get home from school, then pop out to post orders. I usually do marketing tasks in the house at the end of the day, so I can help with homework.

Do you have any advice for others just starting out?

Understanding your audience and creating a strong brand identity will get you a long way and probably save you money in the long run. Also, invest in good photography – it is key to selling online.

Making jewellery

When it comes to running a business that involves being creative and crafting something beautiful, you can't do much better than jewellery making. Getting organised and armed with the right know-how will ensure you start off on the right track



WORDS BY FIONA DAVIES BUSINESS MANAGER, WOMEN IN RURAL ENTERPRISE (WIREUK.ORG)

COLLECTING CUSTOMERS

- Take time to identify your niche, your place in the market and to understand customers who buy the kind of products you create. What makes your pieces special and different to others on the market?

Produce your items according to where you position yourself; bespoke, unique materials, quirky, themed or in a particular style. Telling a story around your collection – explaining your inspiration, your materials or your ethics – will help to secure a sale.

- Images are your best friend; make sure you have plenty showing your jewellery on models and as stand-alones on a white background. Feature them on your website, social media and business cards, and change them frequently.
- Marketplace websites (etsy.com or notonthehighstreet.com) are a great way to sell unique and bespoke items. But it is a crowded market; to stand out, thread your story through all your listings and regularly refresh your pages. Keep an eye on the



cost, though – it can add up quickly.

- Think carefully about what to call your business. People admire jewellery on others and, in order to recommend you, customers need to remember your name, so be simple, short and snappy.

OUT AND ABOUT

- Jewellery is often a spontaneous purchase; sometimes a picture just won't do, people want to touch and try. Research fairs and exhibitions – ask organisers for statistics and visit before you book. Only exhibit at places where the

sort of people who are likely to buy your jewellery will be.

- Make it easy for customers to try and to imagine. Avoid glass barriers, which deter interaction; instead have a big mirror and some scarves so people can experiment with styles and colours. Do be aware, though, that this sort of activity will draw a crowd, which makes it easy for nimble fingers.

- Extend your creativity into your marketing and look to the less obvious places to display and sell; bridal fairs, hotel receptions, summer balls or florist's (wearing your own designs, naturally).

THE BUSINESS OF JEWELLERY

- You may enjoy making pieces best of all, but you must set aside time to review your finances, stock and marketing strategy. The most successful entrepreneurs compartmentalise their work; earmark a specific day each week to deal with these necessities so that your head is clear for the next four days of crafting jewellery.

- Comply with all the legalities and practicalities of the industry, particularly the safety, wearability and

statement of composition. If you need to register and apply a hallmark, contact theassayoffice.co.uk.

- Pricing for profit means balancing your costs and time with what the market will take. You don't have to be cheap but you won't sell much at fairs if your pieces are too expensive. Offer a variety of products at different price points to satisfy all pockets. Customers can always buy another item from the collection at a later date – make sure they leave with one of your cards.

SOURCEBOOK

The National Association of Jewellers – a national trade body that promotes and supports UK jewellery and silverware suppliers (naj.co.uk)

Association for Contemporary Jewellery – representation and mentoring for contemporary jewellery makers in the UK (acj.org.uk)

London Jewellery School – support, courses and bootcamps covering the business and creative topics (londonjewelleryschool.co.uk)

TELLING A STORY
AROUND YOUR
COLLECTION HELPS
TO SECURE A SALE

AN OFFICE TO CALL HOME

Let *Country Living* Magazine's decorating experts inspire you to transform even the smallest of spaces into the perfect place to run your own business

COMPILED BY ALAINA BINKS AND BEN KENDRICK



Practicality and functionality are the most important factors to consider when creating a home office, but there is no reason why it can't also be as attractive and characterful as the rest of your house. An area that is relaxed, stylish and comfortable will feel more inviting, creative and motivating, and therefore boost your productivity. Consider how the space will work and what you need to do in it. Begin by making sure you have ample storage, good lighting, enough desk space and a supportive chair, especially if you will be spending long periods of time sitting down. Then your choice of wall colour, furniture and accessories will give it the finishing touches.

From setting up your office in a corner of a bedroom to having a dedicated outbuilding, there are several ways to incorporate a work area into your house or garden.

MULTI-FUNCTIONAL SPACES

Utilise little-used areas such as under the stairs, alcoves or the corners of rooms. They don't need to be large, especially if you use very little equipment, but bear in mind ➡

THIS PAGE Make the most of compact space using clever storage solutions



THIS PICTURE Neutral tones from off-whites and soft stones to warm pale greys are great for walls and create a tranquil effect to help you focus. Hints of yellow, orange or red will energise the scheme



THIS PAGE, ABOVE LEFT Create an inspiring focus by displaying images and fabrics on a moodboard **ABOVE RIGHT** Line the back of made-to-measure shelving with wallpaper **BELOW** Cover clipboards from re-foundobjects.com with decorative papers



that often these areas will be communal at certain times of the day, so you will need to be able to work around that.

If you are incorporating a workstation into a bedroom or sitting room, it is a good idea to use a divider – a simple curtain or freestanding screen can work well. To make the latter, attach three panels of MDF wood together using hinges (you could also wallpaper or paint them to suit the style of your home office). Alternatively, custom-made designs are available.

Choose cleverly designed compact furniture: a desk with built-in drawers, or a piece that can be closed when not in use, such as a bureau cabinet or cupboards with a desk inside that pulls out. These will help to keep everything concealed – important when the office space is always on view.

For made-to-measure screens, try Jali (01227 833333; jali.co.uk). Find a good selection of bureaux, concealed study-cupboards and secretaires (enclosed desks

with a cabinet above) at The Dormy House (01264 365808; thedormyhouse.com).

THE SPARE ROOM

An empty box room, garage or bedroom offers a greater degree of work-life separation. Not only are you less likely to be distracted or interrupted by other members of your household, but you are able to work when you choose to. Having a dedicated room will also allow you to opt for permanent fixtures or custom-made wall unit systems.

For walls of storage and built-in bookcases in which to keep tools and materials, try James Mayor Furniture (jamesmayor.co.uk) or Neville Johnson (nevillejohnson.co.uk).

IN THE GARDEN

An outbuilding such as a shed, garden studio, summerhouse or shepherd's hut offers the convenience of being close to home while being away from potentially distracting day-to-day activity. For artists ➡



THIS PICTURE
Choose a space
with good natural
light such as a
bay window. Use
desk lamps for
concentrated
lighting for
specific tasks



MAKING YOUR SPACE A SUCCESS

LIGHTING

● For a good range of light fittings, including the kind that can be clamped onto the side of a desk or onto a shelf, try Heal's (020 7896 7451; heals.com), Ikea (020 3645 0015; ikea.com/gb) and John Lewis (0345 604 9049; johnlewis.com).

STORAGE

● Find decorative box files at Harris & Jones (01908 587858; harrisandjones.co.uk) and Kate Forman (01962 732244; kateforman.co.uk).

DISPLAYS

Think of creative ways to organise administrative tasks, such as displaying paperwork effectively and simply by using a row of clipboards hung on a wall, one for each day of the week. Buy a

pegboard or create a wipeable memo board by covering a wall with chalkboard paint.

● For a collection of fabric-covered boards, see Sophie Allport (01778 560256; sophieallport.com).

● Buy chalkboard paint from Homebase (homebase.co.uk).

● Find pegboards at Kreisdesign (020 7837 0820; kreisdesign.com).

FURNITURE

Think imaginatively and create your own original furniture. For a unique desk, set a reclaimed door on a trestle. Sand and re-paint a wooden chair to make a pretty seat with the addition of a cushion.

● Make use of pieces with castor wheels, which you will be able to move

easily around the room.

● Find desks at Loaf (0845 468 0697; loaf.com). For traditional styles, both ready-painted and bare wood, try Scumble Goosie (01453 731305; scumblegoosie.co.uk).

● Seek out old doors at salvage yards and Salvo Web (salvo.co.uk).

● For a selection of seat cushions, try Susie Watson Designs (0844 980 8185; susiewatsondesigns.co.uk).

● Buy office chairs at Ikea (020 3645 0015; ikea.com/gb) and designer styles at The Conran Shop (0844 848 4000; conranshop.co.uk).

● Discover vintage furniture, from trunks to industrial filing cabinets, at Home Barn (01628 474011; homebarnshop.co.uk).

and craftspeople, the bare wood floor of a shed or summerhouse gives extra freedom to be creative as there's no need to worry about carpets. All these buildings could be turned into a comfortable retreat with areas in which to work and relax. To achieve this, hang curtains at the windows, add an armchair or small sofa, paint inside and out, fit shelving or a peg rail and introduce character with interesting pieces of furniture.

Find shepherd's huts at The English Shepherd's Hut Co (01603 397777; englishshepherdhut.co.uk), Heritage Shepherd's Huts (07791 185026; heritageshepherdhuts.co.uk) and PlankBridge (01300 348414; plankbridge.com). For garden studios, try Crane Garden Buildings (01760 444229; cranegardenbuildings.co.uk), Dunster House (01234 272445; dunsterhouse.co.uk), Cambridge Garden Studios (01954 488306; cambridgegardenstudios.co.uk) and Warwick Offices (01926 932272; warwickoffices.co.uk).

Discover sheds and summerhouses at The Posh Shed Company (01544 387101; theposhshedcompany.co.uk), B&Q (0333 014 3098; diy.com) and Crane Garden Buildings (as before).

THIS PAGE Use folding tables and chairs to create a flexible workspace that doesn't need to be in constant use



SEW • COOK • WRITE • DRAW • MAKE • GROW



THE ESSENTIAL
to-do
list



The essential to-do list

The rules of business are there to help protect you, your enterprise and your customers, and these vital steps only need to be taken once

WORDS BY FIONA DAVIES

Whatever you do, don't skip this critical stage or let it put you off. Here is a breakdown of the key areas to address.

A LEGAL STRUCTURE

Choose the way you would like to operate your business:

Sole trader – You are self-employed, you run your own venture as an individual; you have total control of it and full liability for debt. It is possible to take on staff – being a sole trader means you're responsible for the enterprise, not that you have to work alone. You must:

- Register as self-employed with HMRC (even if part-time)
- File a Self-Assessment each year and make National Insurance contributions
- Pay tax on profits after business expenses and personal allowances have been deducted

Limited company – describes a business as a separate legal entity so your personal financial exposure is reduced. There is a small cost involved and it takes a bit longer to set up; you need named directors, at least one shareholder and

information about how the company will run and allocate shares. You must:

- Incorporate your business via Companies House (search 'Companies House' at gov.uk) and return annual accounts
- Pay income tax and National

Insurance contributions through the company's Pay As You Earn scheme if you take a salary as the Director (you are then an employee)

- File an annual Self-Assessment as requested by HMRC (which includes

director salary and dividends – search 'HMRC' at gov.uk)

- Complete a Company Tax Return for HMRC annually; for many small limited companies, tax is around 20 per cent of profits after expenses and allowances

Value Added Tax (VAT) is levied on the sale of most goods and services; if your turnover exceeds the threshold (£83,000 per annum in 2015-16), your business must be VAT-registered. Then you charge VAT on sales and do a quarterly VAT return.

REGULATIONS AND LICENCES

Anything you make or sell that people will put in or on their body (generally food and cosmetics) are more heavily controlled, as are children's products. If you have premises, you must meet health and safety standards to protect customers. Taking on staff? You'll need to comply with employment law and wage guidelines. Some businesses require a licence to operate, especially those that have an 'open door' to the public, plus others have to comply

ENTERPRISING WAYS TO USE YOUR TIME

10 MINS Decide on the business name. If you're struggling, use a name generator such as naminum.com. Once you settle on it, create a Google Alert for mentions of your company on the internet – knowing where and what is being said about you is very powerful.

30 MINS Set up a separate bank account. For a limited company, this is a requirement but even for sole traders it makes sense to distinguish between your business finances and your personal banking; it will be easier to reconcile invoices and payments, and is more professional.

60+ MINS Transfer your financial records onto a spreadsheet or accounting package. Get into the habit of doing this regularly after each event or on a weekly basis and you won't have a massive task at the end of the year when you come to file your accounts.

*Each area in England
has a Growth Hub
(lepnetwork.net/growth-hubs), a physical space
that offers support and
drop-in sessions to help
you in the early stages*

with trading standards regulations. For most of the above, your local council should be able to help and issue licences (see the Start Up section of the directory). Finally, if holding data you must have consent and comply with the Data Protection Act. It is good practice to have a notice on your website saying what use you will make of information.

THE NAME OF THE GAME

Try to be objective when deciding on what to call your business. It's a good idea to choose one that will give potential customers an insight into what you do; for example, Dotty Days Dog Walking or a reference to your values or objectives, such as Sarah's Sustainable Fashion. Consider the following:

- Be as simple as you can; the name should be easy to spell, say and search online
- Make sure no one else is using it already; consult business listings, yell.com, social media sites and search in general online
- Check at Companies

House that it is not a limited company (search 'Companies House' at gov.uk)

- Seek confirmation that the business name is not already registered as an Intellectual Property Office trademark (search 'Intellectual Property Office' at gov.uk)
- Do not use the terms Ltd, Plc or equivalent (unless you are, in which case you need to)
- It must not be offensive or contain sensitive words

PROTECTING YOUR IDEAS

You can prevent people stealing or copying: the names of items, services or brands, your inventions, the design or look of products, things you write, make or produce. The four types of protection are: copyright, patents, designs and trademarks. This works both ways, so check you're not 'stealing' someone else's idea, designs, words or photos. Intellectual Property legislation can be expensive and time consuming. Sometimes it is easier to compromise and move forward with your start-up rather than face a lengthy battle.

SEW • COOK • WRITE • DRAW • MAKE • GROW



CASE STUDY: INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Emma Heathcote-James of Little Soap Company (littlesoapcompany.co.uk) had an unexpected brush with patent laws. Her enterprise was originally called Naked Soap Company but, following extensive press coverage, it came to the attention of a larger business also trading with the Naked name. This business discovered an old trademark and obtained consent to enforce it – meaning that no one could use the word Naked in class 3 products (that is, all beauty products). She was left with the following three options:

1. A landmark legal case at a cost of around £75,000 and no guarantee of success
2. To comply and change the name again, also costing thousands of pounds and, essentially, starting over (including the website, SEO, images, packaging, marketing and brand)
3. Close the business

Emma doesn't give up easily – she decided on option number 2 and Little Soap Company is now very successful, with products stocked in national supermarkets and many outlets. However, this is a cautionary tale: do your Intellectual Property homework before you start.

A photograph of a young man, seen from behind, wearing a grey chef's jacket and a blue fedora. He is holding a large metal spatula with chocolate residue on it. In the foreground, there is a large stainless steel pot filled with melted chocolate. The background shows a kitchen setting with various equipment.

THE CHOCOLATIER

CHOC AWAY!

Take inspiration from a young entrepreneur who jumped through all the hoops to enjoy the sweet smell of success

WORDS BY KITTY CORRIGAN • PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRENT DARBY



It could be a sequel to Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. A 16-year-old boy, who regularly plays truant from school, is frequently suspended and leaves without any GCSEs, is given a break by a kindly prince and now runs his own successful business at 22. In this version, the teenager is Liam Burgess, and his benefactor is The Prince's Trust, a charity that helps vulnerable young people develop skills and find work. Now he is a chocolate entrepreneur and his product is NomNom – the name chosen to evoke the tastebud sensation of an explosion of contrasting flavours.

Although Liam dislikes the word 'artisan' as it sounds exclusive, the bars he sells at £3-£4 each are not your average corner-shop snack. They contain the very best seasonal ingredients, each one carefully sourced. Varieties include Halen Môn sea salt, Welsh lavender and honey, with intriguing new flavours 🍫





"AS A CHILD, FROM MY ATTIC
BEDROOM ON A COLD
WINTER'S NIGHT, I WOULD
BREATHE IN THE THICK,
WARM SMELL OF
CHOCOLATE"

being tested all the time – rhubarb, raspberries and blueberries, which are harvested near Liam's workshop in the Welsh village of Llanboidy, Carmarthenshire, have all found their way into the mix.

Cream and butter ("the more the better") come from Calon Wen, an organic milk co-operative. "This used to be a dairy county," Liam explains, "and the areas where the farmers have gone out of business are now desolate." He's doing his bit to keep the industry in business, visiting producers in his NomNomobile, with his companion Marley the

Labrador (chocolate, of course).

Liam is very much hands-on, assisted by his team of five, all under 21, and his mother Emma, who stirs the latest batches devised by Finn the chef. Together they compare tasting notes until Liam is happy with the recipe. Then he pours the chocolate mixture into moulds, assisted by Seren and fills them with that day's ingredients – caramel, honeycomb or marmalade – using a piping bag. He pours another layer on top, scrapes off the excess and places the moulds in the fridge for a short time to set.

A PASSION FOR CHOCOLATE

Each bar is wrapped in coloured foil by Lou (known to eat three bars a day yet as thin as a rake), then in brown paper by Lili and checked by the pair, known as the 'quality-control queens' (rejects are heartily devoured by the team), before being boxed up and despatched to the shops.

Chocolate is in Liam's blood. He grew up just three doors away from the Cadbury's factory in Bournville, the model village near Birmingham. "From my attic bedroom on a cold winter's night, I would breathe in the thick, warm smell," he recalls. When the family moved house to Wales, he opened a chocolate shop under the stairs at the age of ten, selling ten-pence Lucky Bags containing mini Fudge bars and Heroes. He also helped out on a local farm when he should have been at school and was paid in chocolate biscuits. ("I managed to get a pay rise from Tesco's own brand to McVitie's.")

School seemed irrelevant to Liam, but he developed an interest in food through foraging for hazelnuts (and squirrels) in the woods. He was fortunate enough to be taken on by a French chef-restaurant owner, Ludovic Dieumegard, at The Red Cow in Newcastle Emllyn in the same county. There, "this cocky little rascal" (Liam's words) received training and was encouraged to develop his own chocolates.

Liam's mother Emma never despaired of her wayward son and it was while living ➡





LIAM IS DETERMINED THAT NOMNOM WON'T BE GOBBLED UP BY A BIG CORPORATION

in a caravan at the bottom of her garden that he dreamt up the idea of his own brand. She gave up the final year of her degree in textiles to help when the business launched in 2013 and is now busy working on new packaging ideas. "My greatest achievement to date," she says with pride, "is wrapping 50,000 chocolate bars in one shift."

A HELPING HAND

The simplicity of the current design was a last-minute necessity before Liam's pitch to The Prince's Trust in 2012. Short of both time and money, he bought rolls of brown paper and, with his mother and some mates, hand-stamped 500 bars with his grandfather's vintage John Bull printing set. At that time his concoction

was called Llaethdy Llaeth – Welsh for Dairy Milk – so labelling lasted well into the night ("All those Welsh 't's!"). Liam won over the panel ("not at all like *Dragons' Den* – they are willing you to succeed") and was accepted onto a four-day Explore Enterprise course in Swansea: "Apart from the talk on tax by HMRC when I fell asleep, it was brilliant. Everything about start-ups was clearly explained." A loan of £3,000 enabled him to buy basic equipment and fit out the cowshed converted by his farmer landlord. "I've been helped by so many incredible people," he says. Having Benedict Cumberbatch as a Prince's Trust ambassador was an added perk.

Liam has appointed his mother 'Keeper of Deliciousness', while he has named himself 'Director of Mischief' – titles that also could have come straight from *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. And, like the story's hero, Liam reveres his grandfather. "He has always been a wheeler-dealer and used to slip me cash whenever he could," he says. He was also the inspiration for Liam's style of dress – tweed jacket, tie, waistcoat and fob watch – when not wearing the obligatory overalls and hat in the workshop.

As word spreads about NomNom, Liam has ambitions to build a bigger premises where shareholders will decide how the business is run, and is determined that he will not deal with supermarkets or be gobbled up by a big corporation. He has boundless energy and even sleeps on site when there is a large order to complete. Most days, however, he goes home to the house that his family lived in for more than ten years, and which he has now bought. It has been redecorated many times by interim residents, but the space under the stairs where he opened his first shop remains reassuringly untouched.

i For more information on NomNom Chocolate, call 01994 448761 or visit nomnom.cymru.



Q&A

LIAM BURGESS, NOMNOM CHOCOLATE

Is there anything you wish you'd known when you started?

The beauty of NomNom is that it's a really young team, so we're all a little naïve. None of us had a clue about running a business in the beginning, which is a good thing because we don't play by the rules. So we try things that people in the know probably wouldn't. Because of that, there's a lot of character in this company. After all, chocolate is supposed to be fun!

What was the business like in the beginning?

I would load up the van and be on the road, searching for independent delis and farm shops. NomNom is all about collaborating with local producers and forming strong relationships.

What was your first goal?

The real aim was challenging myself: setting and reaching targets and seeing what I'm actually capable of. All members of the team are developing themselves within different roles. As is often the case with a small company, there is a lot of crossover – no one has one job title they stick to.

How do you build the best team?

Our HR captain writes hilarious interview questions that are totally irrelevant but mean we get the right kind of



“EVEN IF THINGS
DON'T FEEL LIKE A
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people: those who know how to have fun with it and can be put on the spot. It's an unusual yet effective way of doing things. We're all close, so we need someone who fits in but also brings new ideas to the table.

What was your biggest challenge?

We've made a few mistakes along the way. Cardamom white chocolate didn't quite work, but instead of thinking, “Chuck it in the bin,” we said, “How can we save this? What else could we add?” Even if things don't feel like a success at first, we persist until they do. Nothing is ever a waste of

time; it's all about learning as you go. You can always turn things around.

How have you carried out market research?

We don't really believe in all that – what's important is that we make chocolate that we want to eat ourselves and, in being true to that, others will find it delicious, too. Making things that people want beats making people want things – it's much more satisfying sharing something you like with customers than trying to invent something for a specific demographic.

What's next?

We have big plans. There aren't many job opportunities in this part of Wales; I received a lot of help and I'd love to offer that support to others, so we are considering setting up an entrepreneurial space for young people here. We also want to set up an employee shareholder scheme.

Do you have any advice for others just starting out?

Don't feel weighed down by the way things 'ought' to be going. Be free to experiment. Have faith in your ideas and the confidence to know it's not that hard as long as you stay positive, utilise your skills and those of the people around you. It doesn't need to be ridiculously expensive either; just be resourceful.

WORDS FROM THE WISE



Guy Watson, founder, Riverford Organic Farmers

“Don’t give any money to lawyers. If you have a good product, people are always going to want to copy you – just make sure you stay better than your competitors.”

riverford.co.uk



SPARE-TIME START-UP

WORKING AROUND EXISTING COMMITMENTS

GROW ORGANIC CUT
FLOWERS

FACT FILE

NAME Amanda Fawzi**AGE** 55**LIVES IN** Cupar, Fife**SPECIALISES IN**Homegrown British
flowers (07790 680763;
[thecountrygarden
company.co.uk](http://thecountrygardencompany.co.uk))

What was the inspiration behind your business? As an avid gardener, I believed the interest in seasonal and local food should – and could – be extended to flowers. I had given up my career as a physiotherapist and, as my children had recently left home, wanted a new focus.

How did you get started? Flower growing needs both a short- and long-term plan, so I planted seeds and bulbs – based on what my friends said they would want – which would bloom at different times. Now I take regular cuttings to keep costs down. I sold at farmers' markets but often had flowers left over, so decided to supply florists and sell my own bouquets as well.

Describe a typical working day. I do paperwork and social media first because once I get into the garden it's hard to come

back in again. I then cut flowers so there is time to condition them, prepare posies, do deliveries and keep on top of hoeing. Most of my work is done from Wednesday to Saturday, with occasional Sunday tidy-ups. This allows me to focus on one event at a time instead of spending all week picking and arranging for lots of different bouquets.

Biggest challenge? The weather. Predicting flowering times is almost impossible but, on the plus side, my customers know that each of my bouquets is unique. I've also found it hard to say no because when you first set up a business you say yes to everything. Recently, sticking with and developing my own style, I have become better at declining jobs I know aren't right for me.

The best thing about running your own business? I can take it in whatever direction I want – in 2012, we had an abundance of lavender, so I made a flavoured syrup with it, which sold out. I then produced other seasonal food items, but the wedding and event floristry side has continued to expand so that is what I am focusing on now. I am also aiming to grow more varieties of flowers and foliage to extend my season, so there will be bouquets available from April to November.



ENTERPRISING WAYS TO USE YOUR TIME

10 MINS **Grow your own** Sow seedlings in propagators, windowboxes or a greenhouse, which can then be planted out and cultivated in your garden.

30 MINS **Pick up the phone** Contact local businesses that might need fresh flowers and offer a special rate for them to trial your services – event planners, churches

and local companies with reception areas may all be interested in low-cost arrangements.

60+ MINS **Share your skills** Use any wastage creatively by setting up a last-minute flower-arranging session. Potential customers will leave with a free bouquet and a very positive impression of your business.

TIP Go to *britishfloristassociation.org* to find floristry courses in your area and nationwide.

AMANDA'S SPARE-TIME START-UP TIP: take the chance to look into the market you will be operating in and the customers you'll be supplying before you begin. I didn't carry out proper research, assuming that everyone would love my flowers and be happy to pay for them, which wasn't wise.



THE ESSENTIAL 'TO-DO' LIST



THE CRAFTER

MATERIAL PLEASURES

Following a life-changing illness, Sam Coates summoned up the courage to pursue her dream of setting up a business based on her love of sewing and beautiful fabrics

WORDS BY RUTH CHANDLER ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRUCE HEMMING





Step into Sam Coates' studio near Tenterden in Kent on a dull March day and you'll leave any worries behind in an instant. Warmth radiates from the wood-fired Rayburn, Toffee, the ginger-and-white cat, curls up in a basket full of material, and a vintage floral sofa is invitingly strewn with cushions. As well as learning new skills such as dressmaking, patchwork or millinery, customers come here to enjoy the tranquillity and beautiful surroundings on offer. Revealed in the numerous bolts of fabric, dozens of craft books, colour-themed glass jars of buttons and shelves of millinery blocks is a lifetime's fascination with textiles, which has recently found the ideal outlet.

"I really enjoy helping people to believe in themselves and discover their abilities," explains Sam, dressed in a Liberty peacock-feather-print tunic she made herself. "Some people haven't even picked up a needle before they come to

one of my sessions, but everyone leaves with something they have made."

Sam's passion for craft was kindled in childhood. One of her earliest memories is learning to knit at four years old in her parents' caravan on the Isle of Sheppey, where they lived, while they built their house. "Mum was very resourceful – she taught me using pencils instead of needles," says Sam, as she cuts six slices of freshly baked Victoria sandwich and prepares mugs of tea for today's tutees who have come to learn the art of curtain-making. By the age of nine, she was sewing her own clothes and, when she married at 19, created all the soft furnishings for her and her husband Leon's first home. Sam gleaned other techniques – smocking, felting, embroidery – from experts she met at events, such as craft fairs, and built up an armoury of talents. While raising her son Edward, now 27, and daughter Jessica, 24, helping Leon to renovate

their houses, and taking part-time shop work when money was tight, she continued to practise her increasing number of hobbies. In 2005, she decided to formalise her training and studied fashion and textiles at Ashford College of Art (now Ashford School of Art & Design), hoping to secure a job in the industry, and, during the degree, was offered a job at a men's luxury accessories manufacturer.

FOCUSING ON THE FUTURE

The inspiration for setting up her business, Sew Not Strawberry Jam, came when she was well enough to start crafting again following a battle with breast cancer. Throughout this life-changing period, she had continued to work when possible, but naturally the illness had helped her focus on what mattered most: a desire to pass on techniques and ensure the survival of textile crafts. The idea began to take ➔

"I REALLY ENJOY HELPING PEOPLE
TO BELIEVE IN THEMSELVES AND
DISCOVER THEIR ABILITIES"





CUSTOMERS RANGE FROM TEENAGERS TO WOMEN IN THEIR FORTIES – “I’VE TAUGHT ALMOST 400 PEOPLE SO FAR!”

root but it was when she was asked by a friend to teach her 11-year-old daughter to sew in autumn 2010 that her ambition was confirmed: “Poppy came for the day and we made a green and purple felt tea cosy together. I found the whole process very fulfilling.” Sam realised that, rather than holding courses, she could offer more informal one-off learning experiences to help students complete a simple project.

SOCIAL MEDIA SAVVY

When the Coates family moved to Waypost Farm in 2000, along with the house and its four-acre plot they inherited an 80-foot-long tumbledown shed that Sam had gradually uncovered from a tangle of brambles and ivy to transform into a large sewing room. To make it suitable as a teaching venue, she had the heating system (fed by a range bought on ebay) and a sink and

worktop area installed, while Leon, a carpenter by trade, built the large tables. “Other junk-shop finds fell into place, including old science laboratory benches and an antique glove cupboard, which became the perfect haberdashery organiser,” Sam says. Then there were the sewing machines to buy and just a few finishing touches such as the fabric skirt around the edge of the worksurfaces. By January 2011, after juggling her job and running classes part-time, Sam found the courage to leave work and fully focus on her new enterprise, launching a website and forcing herself to use Facebook (she now finds it invaluable for networking and keeping in touch with students).

Teaching has come naturally to Sam, which is clear from the way she is subtly gauging the different abilities within today’s group, following her demonstration of measuring and cutting

the curtain fabric: “At first, I was a little nervous, but now I can read people very quickly, judge what pace to move at and understand what they need from the session.” Customers range from teenagers (“Incredibly quick learners, they’re very rewarding to teach”) who have been inspired to make their own clothing by television programmes such as BBC’s *The Great British Sewing Bee* to women in their forties who feel, until they leave Waypost Farm holding their own finished item, a total lack of confidence with craft, and those in their seventies who want help in perfecting a technique. “I have taught almost 400 people so far!” Sam says.

As the business has grown, expert tutors, including Mandy Patullo, who specialises in collage, and Rosie James, a free-machine embroiderer, have been invited to teach workshops, and Sew Laid Back sessions run on Thursday daytimes and evenings, where students can work on their own project with Sam’s help.

Overlooking the Romney sheep and lambs that graze the Coates’ land, a prettily furnished shepherd’s hut provides bed-and-breakfast accommodation for those coming from far afield, and plans are afoot to convert a 1960s Bedford horse box into a second glamping spot for guests. In its fourth year, Sew Not Strawberry Jam is now earning Sam a salary equivalent to her previous job, but despite the success she has no plans to expand: “There is such demand for classes that the business could easily develop further if I wanted it to, but at the moment I would much rather stay hands-on and continue to do what I enjoy most of all, which is passing on skills, not building a brand.”

1 *Sew Not Strawberry Jam, Waypost Farm, Stone-in-Oxney, Tenterden, Kent (01233 758398; sewnotstrawberryjam.co.uk). Visit the website for details of Sew Laid Back evenings, one-to-one sessions and birthday and hen party options.*



Q&A

SAM COATES, SEW NOT STRAWBERRY JAM

What were the first steps in setting up Sew Not Strawberry Jam?

The first thing I did was get my building ready. And then my website. Being online is absolutely key. You couldn't do without it these days. And, once you're up and running, it's free!

Did it seem like a realistic business idea when you first thought of it?

Yes. I didn't think about it a great deal. If you look at the competition too much, it can become overwhelming and you begin to question whether there is room for you, too. But you soon see that there is.

When you started, what was your goal?

It kept changing. I started off just with teaching on a one-to-one basis and doing small workshops. Having guest tutors run classes here came about by demand. It wasn't my original plan, I hadn't thought about it at the beginning.

Were your feelings about your pastime altered when it went from hobby to business?

Yes – I found it incredibly satisfying. For years I didn't talk about sewing to people because it was perceived as mumsy. Now, I feel excited and proud of what I do.



"IF YOU LOOK AT THE COMPETITION TOO MUCH, IT CAN BECOME OVERWHELMING AND YOU BEGIN TO QUESTION WHETHER THERE IS ROOM FOR YOU, TOO"

How do you make your business stand out?

My studio is beautiful. Some people say that it's their favourite place in the world. They may not even come to sew – they just love being in this room. I try to create an environment that I want to be in. Attention to detail is so important.

What's the best thing about working for yourself?

The sense of success – and picking my own hours. If it's a beautiful day, I can go out. I am able to work in the evening or I can get up early in the morning and do it.

What is the worst aspect of having your own business?

I have often felt a pressure to keep expanding and growing Sew Not Strawberry Jam – so much so that, at one point, I couldn't stop thinking about it. But now I've decided to put it all on hold and just enjoy what I'm doing at the moment. It's more important that you're where you want to be than to grow.

What are the highlights so far?

I love to see other people really happy with what they have achieved.

Do you have any advice for others just starting out?

If you really believe in it, stick with it, because it can be slow to begin with. It took me a couple of years to find my feet.

What sacrifices have you made?

Not having colleagues, so everything is down to you. It's quite nice to go to a job and work in a team. But there have been far more benefits than disadvantages.

Your biggest challenge so far?

Motivation. If you think things are a bit tough, you begin to question whether you are able to carry on. Then you get a nice email from someone and you think, 'Yes, I can.' People keep you going.

Teaching craft courses

Britain's appetite for learning traditional skills such as sewing and knitting means that it's an ideal time to earn a living from passing on your know-how to others. Here's how to expand once you're up and running



WORDS BY FIONA DAVIES BUSINESS MANAGER, WOMEN IN RURAL ENTERPRISE (WIREUK.ORG)

DEALING WITH THE PRACTICALITIES

- For information about rules and regulations, insurance and environmental factors about running sessions from home, see *Creating the Perfect Working Environment*.
- If you are using an outside space, such as a garden studio, it will be glorious in the summer, but soggy grass, spiders and cold trips inside to the loo in the winter will soon make for dissatisfied customers. Think about how you can address potential negatives – consider changing venues, offering brollies, providing extra heating and serving homemade soup.
- Can you guarantee enough numbers at each session? If not, will they still be financially viable? There is scope to turn this into a positive by giving one-to-one tuition.

FOCUSING ON YOUR CUSTOMERS' EXPERIENCE

- Have a clear and consistent calendar of events. Customers will want to pick and choose dates and topics, and, ideally, book online (this makes planning easier for you, plus upfront payment helps



cashflow and reduces the risk of cancellations).

- Ensure you have an easy-to-navigate, up-to-date and search-engine-optimised website (ensuring it is easy to find), including testimonials from those who you've already taught.
- Showcase your products wherever you can: in shops, galleries and, in particular, on your website. Include plenty of great, good-quality pictures – try using Picmonkey.com to add quirky comments and graphics.
- Work out how many people

you could teach in one session – they will need varying levels of help. You want customers to feel supported, but bear in mind that too much additional assistance will eat into your profits.

- If you are running a class that includes all the materials and equipment to make an item, try to account for personal taste (though set yourself a budget or the cost could run away with you). Consider sending a simple question-and-answer form in advance to discover more about your attendees' preferences – it shows that you care and means that they will make and take home something they actually want.

TAPPING INTO NEW MARKETS

- Explore social media tools that suit your venture and are appropriate for your customers.
- You are the brand, so make sure you're always wearing or carrying something you've created – your next client could be standing next to you in the Post Office. Have plenty of stylish business cards ready to hand out (see moo.com).
- Offer different packages to suit the widest range

of customers; how about weekend breaks using local accommodation and restaurants? Consider themed sessions – not only those based on holiday celebrations such as Christmas and Easter, but also current trends you can tap into.

- Build a support network of local enterprises; word of mouth is the best way to attract new clients. It's a good idea to make friends with your suppliers – referring customers both ways will bring more business to you and them.
- Be creative about your marketing – think about where your potential customers might be and take your products there.

SOURCEBOOK

Craft a Creative Business – information about starting up and using social media (craftacreativebusiness.co.uk)
The Makery – this inspiring Bath-based enterprise offers a wide range of courses (themakery.co.uk)
UK Handmade – an online magazine and forum (ukhandmade.co.uk)

BUILD A LOCAL
SUPPORT NETWORK
– WORD OF MOUTH
IS THE BEST WAY TO
ATTRACT CLIENTS

SEW • COOK • WRITE • DRAW • MAKE • GROW



*sell,
sell,
sell*



Sell, sell, sell: devise a marketing plan

“If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail” – Benjamin Franklin perfectly captured why every enterprise needs a marketing strategy

WORDS BY PAULA HUTCHINGS

The numbers speak for themselves: businesses with a marketing strategy are 20 per cent more profitable than those without. Consider it to be the driving force behind your sales. One that is well thought out will keep you on track to achieve the goals stated in your business plan. Without it, you weaken your sales efforts. The plan should provide a framework to ensure marketing is carried out in a controlled way, and that your results (and profits) are maximised. It doesn't need to be an epic work – even a basic version will ensure that you:

- Promote your business
- Identify your target market
- Focus on the best channels for your venture
- Have confidence in your messaging
- Avoid overspending

In your plan, consider your objectives, budget, the pricing of your product or service, what competitors are doing and the potential mix of marketing activities. For guidance and templates, see marketingdonut.co.uk

THE KEY AREAS

Create a positioning statement. This will help you gain confidence in your product or service. How do you stand out from the crowd? Why should people buy from you? What customer need do you fulfil? You need to be able to sum up your enterprise in a succinct and engaging way, including your unique selling point (USP). Your positioning statement will be reflected in all your marketing communications: on your website; during conversations at networking events; when you pitch to

journalists or talk to new customers. Being able to deliver a concise one is a skill well worth perfecting.

Build your brand on a budget. For fledgling businesses, money is tight, so it's important to be innovative and resourceful with what you have. Creating a web presence is fairly inexpensive and easy, thanks to template providers such as wordpress.com, moonfruit.com and squarespace.com. Once you're set up, there are free and low-cost marketing activities – from social media, blogging and email

marketing to networking, pop-ups and partnering with established brands.

COST-EFFECTIVE IDEAS

Use established marketplaces. These platforms are a great way to get your products or services in front of a large audience. High-traffic, well-established ones can help to increase brand awareness and drive sales. Listing and commission fees vary, so do your research to find the best fit for your business.

Potential product marketplaces include notonthehighstreet.com, etsy.com/uk, folksy.com, alldaymama.com, amazon.co.uk and ebay.co.uk. For services, there is upwork.com, peopleperhour.com and freelancer.co.uk.

Harness social media. From increasing brand awareness and opening up a two-way communication with customers to enabling direct contact with journalists, facilitating networking opportunities and being a useful research tool, these channels offer myriad

ENTERPRISING WAYS TO USE YOUR TIME

- 10 MINS** Schedule your social media updates with a management tool such as hootsuite.com.
- 30 MINS** Use a train journey to map out your blog schedule for the upcoming months. This is perfect, uninterrupted time for jotting down your best ideas.
- 60+ MINS** Attend a networking event. Choose wisely and this can be a great way for you to promote your brand, meet new people and potentially gain customers.

*If you're not reaching
your target audience
via social media,
consider paid-for
options such as
ad words and boosted
posts, available on all
major platforms*

benefits. Social media can become overwhelming and time-consuming, so follow these tips for success:

- Research and select the channels that are the most suitable for you. Think about who is your target audience and where they are active.
- Be realistic about how much time you can allocate to social media each week. It's better to choose one channel and do it well.
- Consider how to find fresh content. Writing from scratch is time-consuming, so engage with guest writers, recirculate content and ask customers to talk to you.
- Set objectives for each tool you use. These could include increasing traffic to your website, driving customer

engagement, growing your email list or building brand awareness.

Pop-up and be counted. For many enterprises, temporary spaces present a great way to increase brand awareness and generate sales. Meeting customers face-to-face also provides a valuable market research opportunity. Fairs and trade shows can be costly, so pop-ups offer an affordable alternative. Companies including appearhere.co.uk have transformed the way they can be booked.

Polish your presentation skills. Represent your brand in a professional manner, whether you're attending a customer meeting, speaking with a local shop owner or pitching to a large retailer.

A PRACTICAL MARKETING PLAN

The key to successful strategy is to regularly refer back to it. See it as a living document and keep it updated. Acknowledge your limitations upfront, whether they be finances, resources, internal skills or knowledge. And be sure to set aside a realistic budget (and stick to it).

SEW • COOK • WRITE • DRAW • MAKE • GROW



CASE STUDY: PITCHING PROFESSIONALLY

London-based milliner Joanne Edwards (joanneedwardsmillinery.com) took the plunge and approached her local LK Bennett store to show the staff her work. She was immaculate in appearance and organised with business cards and product samples – all of which reflected very positively on her brand. Supportive of local businesses, the company agreed to run an in-store event; Joanne brought a selection of her designs and customers could purchase their entire outfit and hat for an upcoming wedding or race event in one place. It was a huge success and Joanne has since collaborated with LK Bennett stores in numerous prestigious London locations. Top tips to boost your confidence include:

- Dress for the occasion
- Be well-prepared
- Know your business inside out
- Practise, practise, practise
- Show a passion for your brand
- Be familiar with your financials

SELL, SELL, SELL



THE SHEPHERDESS

FIELDS OF DREAMS

Meet Lincolnshire-based first-time farmer
Sophie Arlott, who has gained a leading reputation for her
lamb among the country's top chefs and food halls

WORDS BY **ANDREW EAMES** ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY **BRENT DARBY**





Just beyond a partially thatched limestone manor house, on a slight dip in the grass, a pair of stocky and amiable Southdown ewes are grazing contentedly. Casting a watchful eye over them through the French windows is Sophie Arlott. “They’re going to need a good clean before tomorrow,” she says, referring to the county show where she will be exhibiting the best of her 200-strong flock. “I shall be down there after lunch to give them a going-over with a bottle of Fairy Liquid.” This is just one among the many tasks for this particular very modern type of shepherdess.

Sophie’s life hasn’t always involved shampooing sheep. An archaeology graduate from Bristol University, in her early career she worked in the BBC’s Bristol-based natural-history unit before her husband’s job, and the space requirements of a growing family, brought them to this 17th-century former farmhouse in Lincolnshire, with its six acres. It was the land that set in motion a chain of events that led her to where she is today – poised to deliver 300 lambs single-handedly. An animal-lover since

her childhood in Hampshire, when her family kept three cows (an Aberdeen Angus called Heiferlump and two Jerseys, Daisy and Buttercup), Sophie’s first attempt at raising livestock was on a bovine theme but juggling this with family life proved to be a challenge. “Cows were incompatible with toddlers,” she laughs, as her flock jostles around her legs in a hurry to reach their newly filled feeding trough. Her interest in sheep began when she saw a notice in the window of a local farm supply store for three Southdown ewes, which a local farmer was selling for £200.

“I didn’t have a particular plan at the time,” she recalls, resting a hand on the springy fleece of one of her ovine beauties, “other than a desire to keep pure breeds that were under threat.” The ewes, Sophie says, turned out to be sweet-natured and easy to handle, so she bought a couple more at a rare-breeds sale at nearby Melton Mowbray Market. The resulting lamb, which was dispatched and butchered at the local family-run H. Dawson and Sons, was enjoyed by Sophie, her family and friends. The moment of epiphany, ➔

“I’M INVOLVED IN EACH
STAGE OF THE SHEEP’S
LIVES AND KNOW EVERY
SINGLE LAMB”





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MORE
FREE
MAGAZINES

[HTTP://SOEK.IN](http://soek.in)



“THE CONTINENTAL LAMB
FROM THE BUTCHER’S
LOOKED GOOD, BUT IT
DIDN’T HAVE ANY FLAVOUR”



however, came in Easter 2010. She didn’t have enough of her own lamb to feed all her guests, so she bought a shoulder. When she served up both joints, the comparison was a shock. “The butcher’s lamb looked good, but, alongside the Southdown, it didn’t have any flavour. It made me angry – why are we eating tasteless Continental breeds when our native sheep are so much better?”

This revelation was very timely – Sophie’s husband had a health problem, which was affecting his ability to work; her two boys were now teenagers, and she realised she wanted to restart her career. Previously she had been interested in going into education but it was while on a teacher-training course that she had a crucial realisation: she didn’t want to be inside all day. A farming life, although time-consuming, would at least be flexible, and the family would be able to play a part in it, too.

By happy coincidence, her neighbours with land were looking for grazing animals to control a ragwort problem in their fields, so Sophie invested further in British breeds, adding to her Southdowns



with Cheviots, Hebrideans, Romneys and Lleys to bring the total number up to 100. Along the way she enlisted the help of a local countryman, and gleaned a lot of information from a one-day-a-week administrative job in Melton Mowbray Market. Most of her learning, however, has been done on the job: “Established farmers here don’t pass on their knowledge readily, they very much expect you to earn it.”

FROM START TO FINISH

Watching Sophie hoist a block of hay into her farmyard and break it up for a flock of sooty-coloured Hebrideans, you wouldn’t guess she was a relative newcomer. In the few years that she has had a commercial flock (140 lambs the first year, 220 in the second), she has been involved in every part of their lives, presiding over their births, breeding (she has her own rams) and dispatches, taking them herself to the abattoir – and then merchandising, marketing and even delivering the meat right to its final destination, which often includes the restaurants of London’s West End or Harrods Food Hall. All ➡





Lavinton Lamb is personally reared and sold, and nothing goes through the livestock market system, which Sophie believes only creates stress.

PROVING PROVENANCE WORKS

At a time when the origins of our food are increasingly important, Sophie takes traceability to its extreme: "It's been called 'hyper provenance' - I'm involved in each stage of the sheep's lives and know every single lamb." But she doesn't farm this way because it is fashionable; she does it because she believes it produces a better result. "A happy sheep is a tasty sheep," she says, as a group of Romney lambs climbs up the side of a pile of hay before springing off the top. Traceability is particularly important to her clients, too, the vast majority of whom are top-end restaurant chefs, who she signed up by knocking on their doors and offering them tastings. Her approach does, however, mean that there's little chance of ever going away on holiday. Sheep need to be fed and checked up on every day, although Sophie's level of expertise means that leaning over the gate and



softly calling "Hello, girls" is enough to assess whether there's a problem.

Some seasons are easier than others, but most challenging (and rewarding) is the springtime lambing, for which she uses the redbrick and limestone outhouses of a farm just across the road, converted to a maternity ward for the duration. Lambing is a time of early starts, late nights and heightened emotion. "I was distraught when my first sheep died," Sophie says. "Luckily, it hasn't happened again. Last year, I was present for most of my lambs and thankfully I didn't lose a single one."

This year's lambing will once again expand her flock size, and she is hoping that she can find more acreage and increase her sales outlets. Delivering a lamb one week and visiting some of the UK's top restaurants the next, there's no doubt that Sophie (who's on her way back to the house for that bottle of Fairy Liquid) is a farmer for the future.

i *Lavinton Lamb, Old Manor Farm, Lenton, Grantham, Lincolnshire (01476 585960; lavinton.com).*

"I WAS DISTRAUGHT WHEN MY FIRST SHEEP DIED BUT LUCKILY IT HASN'T HAPPENED AGAIN"





Q&A

SOPHIE ARLOTT, LAVINTON LAMB

Did yours first seem like a realistic business idea?

Yes, I felt there was a growing interest at the time (and still is) in the provenance of food. Also, I knew that my product was good. Turning that idea into a business is, however, another story altogether.

What has been your biggest challenge?

To make the business profitable. Although sales were good from the start, the running costs were higher than originally anticipated.

Your proudest moment so far?

I get a buzz when I sell my lamb to a restaurant, particularly high-profile Michelin star eateries such as The Waterside Inn, owned by the Roux brothers. I feel I must be doing something right if chefs like it. I was delighted to win runner-up at the British Farming Awards in the New Entrants Award: Against the Odds.

What's the best lesson you have learned along the way?

Be professional and don't let people down.

How do you pitch your lamb to potential clients?

I email or phone new customers or chefs directly and then send samples.

How do you boost your confidence before pitching?

I'm selling only on a one-to-one basis direct with the



"SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS AND MY WEBSITE ARE AN IMPORTANT PART OF PROMOTING THE BUSINESS – I USE THEM TO TELL MY STORY"

chefs, but even so it really helps to have everything prepared when I visit, such as the correct cut of lamb beautifully packaged, a press release and business card. The aim is to be friendly, organised, efficient and professional.

What role does social media and the internet play?

I do a lot of posting on Twitter (chefs' favourite medium) and Facebook (and don't pay for advertising). The restaurant business is quite a small world. I'm in my fourth year of trading now and clients are starting to approach me rather

than the other way round.

Social media channels and my website are an important part of promoting the business. I use them to tell my story and show photographs of what Lavinton Lamb is all about, and that generates around 20 per cent of sales. Getting your website right is key, as it sets the tone of your venture – it's your shopfront.

How valuable is one-to-one interaction with clients?

It's vital. My business is about building a relationship with a chef as much as with a restaurant. People move on and if you have a good rapport with them, they will use you in their next job. I sometimes host chefs and front-of-house staff at the farm. They meet the sheep, see how my farming calendar works and the way I raise my lambs. Good chefs will always want the best-tasting meat they can get. Talking to my clients and discussing our views and values builds a mutual understanding.

What's the best advice you've been given?

When you tell people about your idea, they will always have a reason why it won't work. People rarely tell you why it will. Don't be put off – make sure you are really passionate about your project or product and that you really believe in what you are doing.

WORDS FROM THE WISE



Jan Constantine, homeware designer and creative director

"Marketing is intrinsic to nearly everything we do in the business.

In the early days, it was important to get the name and products seen and the best way to do this for us has always been through in-house PR. Being featured in magazines gives buyers confidence and helps to open all kinds of doors in the market – before you even knock on them! It's very important to have an interesting story and some great images that make the best of your range. We do press campaigns whenever we have a new launch or something topical to relate to in the media, such as a special royal event. Once you get known in your field, the opportunities for fantastic marketing projects include collaborations with other brands and licensing your designs to different companies. These have been amazing for our business, as they have introduced it to whole new audiences."

janconstantine.com



SPARE-TIME START-UP

WORKING AROUND EXISTING COMMITMENTS

SELL HOMEMADE
CAKES

FACT FILE

NAME Charlotte Baker**AGE** 35**LIVES IN** Market
Harborough,
Leicestershire**SPECIALISES IN**Handmade occasion
cakes and crafting baby
essentials (07769 586503;
thecraftybaker.com)**What was the inspiration behind your business?**

I've baked ever since my grandmother taught me how to make cherry buns as a child. I'd share my cakes with family and friends, and selling was a natural progression. Sewing and fabrics have always been passions of mine, too, so I decided to combine the two interests.

How did you get started? I created a WordPress website and advertised my services using Pinterest. With savings, I paid for stands at local fairs to test the water. I had basic baking equipment and a sewing machine already, so only invested in new items as I needed them.

Describe a typical working day. Having been employed in the fashion industry before I went on maternity leave in 2013, I was often baking late into the evening to get orders ready. Now I have my two-year-old son, Arthur, I'm juggling cake-making

and crafting with childcare. No two days are ever the same: I might be creating sugar roses for a wedding cake, sewing baby items such as blankets and changing mats using organic cotton and bamboo for my Etsy shop, uploading images to Instagram, updating my website or meeting clients to discuss ideas.

Biggest challenge? Once I made 700 cupcakes for a vintage fair using my domestic oven. It took 14 hours and there were boxes of cakes on every available surface in the house.

Best thing about running your own business? Being in charge of your own time. Fitting a business around looking after a toddler full-time presents some difficulties, but as I am self-employed I can decide when to work and how much to do, which is a huge bonus.





Learn techniques such as using royal icing and creating sugarcraft shapes, plus meet Kathy Moore, author of *Starting a Cake Decorating Business from Home* (B. Dutton, £12.99), at Squires Kitchen International School in Farnham, Surrey (squires-school.co.uk).

ENTERPRISING WAYS TO USE YOUR TIME



Think outside the box

Brainstorm unusual ways to promote your skills and products – you could distribute biscuit business cards, with your details iced on top, for example, or offer a homemade cake delivery service for time-poor professionals.



Price it right

Cost out all of your ingredients, factor in packaging and delivery fees, plus any wastage – and then add your profit on top.



Tempt people's tastebuds

Bake batches of favourite recipes and take a stand at a farmers' market to see which ones prove most popular. Hand out free samples and invite feedback.

CHARLOTTE'S SPARE-TIME START-UP TIP: make the most of being unburdened by the expectations that come with a full-time business and a large customer base. You can be more flexible and creative, plus quick to react if you stay small.



THE CARD MAKER

DESIGNS FOR LIFE

Hannah Shelbourne started making stationery in her bedroom as a teenager. Now, she has converted her pastime into profit, creating charming greetings cards and skilfully showcasing her collections

WORDS BY PAULA MCWATERS ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALUN CALLENDER



I t's hard to resist rifling through the little treasures that – alongside her well-used watercolour box and snippets of cotton fabric, old maps and typewritten prose – form the ingredients for Hannah Shelbourne's handmade greetings cards. In the tiny studio of her West Sussex home, at the kitchen table, or outside in the tranquil setting of an abundant garden, you'll often find her surrounded by vintage tins of minute buttons, screw-top jars filled with sparkling trinkets, and shoeboxes of brightly coloured postage stamps. Deftly layering each element, she builds her personalised pieces one stage at a time.

Naturally creative (her mother Jane Silk is a ceramicist and retired art teacher, and her father Peter is a graphic designer), Hannah has developed an uplifting, naive style, intended to have wide appeal. Prancing chickens (based on the hens her mother keeps) are recurring motifs, along with stick figures, rabbits and bees, which she draws and paints on high-quality watercolour card, sourced online in bulk at a discount. "I've recently added collaged, vintage-style notelets and gift tags to my range, too, to attract different customers. I also love combining fragments of sheet music or ➞





text from classic novels with antique buttons or stamps from my dad's childhood collection," she says.

Hannah began making cards as a hobby when she was a teenager and gradually built this up into a three-day-a-week business, which she registered as a company in 2006. She sold primarily through trade shows, but when the independent shops she was supplying were hit by the recession, Hannah was forced to close down and take a full-time administrative job to pay the mortgage. She continued making cards in her spare time, however, and throughout two maternity leaves (for Ethan, now four, and Cora, 18 months). When Cora was born in 2013, and Hannah sustained an incapacitating back injury and was signed off work, she revisited the idea of selling her designs for a living.

AN ONLINE PRESENCE

"Trade shows had become very expensive to exhibit at, so I approached online retailers instead," she explains. "Realising that people were willing to pay extra for bespoke products, I focused on that niche and increased my prices to cover the registration and commission fees." Hannah also embraced Twitter and Facebook: "I saw how other companies were promoting themselves online through prize draws and offers, and ➔

PRANCING CHICKENS ARE RECURRING MOTIFS,
ALONG WITH STICK FIGURES, RABBITS AND BEES







started experimenting. I take part in online networking sessions on Twitter called Tweekchats. When you're running a business, you have to keep putting yourself under the noses of existing and potential customers. I saw the effects immediately, and doubled my daily order numbers in just six months, which was fantastic."

BUILDING A WEBSITE

Today, Hannah has her own website (which she built herself following an introductory short course) and also takes stands at a selection of local craft fairs. As well as giving her invaluable face-to-face customer contact and feedback on new products ("I never had direct interaction with the public when I was selling to

trade. Now I can respond to individual demand"), they also provide an outlet for any unsold stock: "I drew a 'happy spider' design one season, but it wasn't very popular. Selling online gives me the freedom to experiment, as I can quickly remove a card that isn't doing well. I can launch new products almost immediately, too."

With around ten orders now coming in every day, and Ethan and Cora to look after, Hannah enjoys the flexibility of being self-employed, fitting her work around pre-school, daytime naps and the bedtime routine: "I want to build the business slowly and, as the children get older, have ambitions to expand my range. Greetings cards, especially personalised ones, are a simple way to brighten someone's day. Knowing that my work is making people happy really spurs me on."

"SELLING ONLINE GIVES ME THE FREEDOM TO EXPERIMENT
AND I CAN LAUNCH NEW PRODUCTS IMMEDIATELY, TOO"

***Hannah Shelbourne Designs**
(hannahshelbourne.com).*





Q&A

HANNAH SHELBOURNE, HANNAH SHELBOURNE DESIGNS

What do you wish you'd known before starting?

That it's okay to make mistakes. It doesn't mean your business has failed. It's an inevitable part of the process.

Have you made any sacrifices?

Yes, money. Initially, I didn't earn very much for the hours I put into my venture. But I enjoy it, and it enables me to have more time with my children. I don't mind working really hard for that. It's not just about money, it's about lifestyle and fulfilment.

How have you overcome difficulties?

With persistence and perspective. It always helps to get advice from other entrepreneurs over a cup of coffee.

In what ways do you make your business stand out?

I have a great USP as there are very few individually hand-illustrated cards available. Plus, my branding is strong – this helps get me noticed on social media.

What do you like most about working for yourself?

I can use my creativity and work around my family (mostly in the evenings). I'm the boss and if I don't work I don't earn – that keeps me motivated.

Has anything surprised you along the way?

Yes, that I haven't got tired



"I'VE MADE TENS OF
THOUSANDS OF
CARDS BUT I STILL
ENJOY THE PROCESS"

of it. I've made tens of thousands of cards but I still enjoy the process.

What's the best advice you've been given?

Don't give up. If you've got a talent and are passionate about it, there's always a way

to make it work. Sometimes you just have to compromise or change your approach.

What have you learned about the industry since starting?

The greetings card trade is very competitive. There are some very big fish out there and it's easy to get discouraged. But everyone buys cards – it's just a case of finding your niche. When selling to trade customers, it's all about building rapport with the buyer and emphasising the unique qualities of the product. Being friendly, helpful and gently encouraging repeat orders are key to retail.

Has your confidence grown since starting the business?

Yes, I used to take everything very personally because I put my heart and soul into my work. Now I know that my cards aren't for everyone and that's OK.

What advice would you give to others just starting out?

Get to know as much as you can about your customers. Who are they? What do they want? How much are they prepared to pay? Where will they buy? Know your competition, too. In general, make your item or service as simple as possible, and be clear about what you're trying to achieve.

Designing cards

The UK spends £1.4 billion per year on greetings cards and, with the low set-up costs, home-based work and flexible hours that creating them offers, the industry is an attractive one to enter. Arm yourself with all the know-how on getting noticed and you'll soon be drawing lots of customers



WORDS BY FIONA DAVIES BUSINESS MANAGER, WOMEN IN RURAL ENTERPRISE (WIREUK.ORG)

DIY PUBLISHING

- Don't try to please everyone – find your niche. Spend time developing your own unique style and then make minor modifications to individual designs to help you reach a wider market: changing the colour or picture, for example.
- Take the opportunity to produce limited-edition ranges that mark a nationwide event or celebrations that are fast gaining popularity such as baby showers.
- In the early stages, markets are a great opportunity to see first-hand which designs do and don't appeal to customers. However, setting up your own online shop can be a cheaper and lower-risk option. You could also approach market websites such as etsy.com and notonthehighstreet.com, which are ranked highly in search engines, to sell on your behalf, but be aware you will be charged commission.
- Protect your work – the Intellectual Property Office (ipo.gov.uk) is a good source of advice on issues such as copyright.
- People are willing to pay more for bespoke designs, so don't undersell your work. Ensure the retail cost of your



items covers raw materials, production and your time. If creating your own cards doesn't appeal, consider licensing your work to larger manufacturers.

- Find printing companies that can offer small production runs as you start out, and build strong relationships with them – there may be times when you need to rush an order or make a last-minute alteration.

PRODUCE LIMITED-
EDITION RANGES
THAT MARK A
NATIONWIDE EVENT
OR CELEBRATION

PROMOTE YOUR WORK

- In addition to using Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest or Instagram, consider marketing opportunities offline. You could send press releases and one or two samples of your work to appropriate local and national publications – personalising cards to the recipients where possible may get your products noticed more readily (take care not to eat into your budget, however).
- Once you're well-established and producing a large number of designs, consider exhibiting at a trade show, such as Top Drawer (topdrawer.co.uk), Progressive Greetings Live (progressivegreetings.co.uk), Spring Fair International (springfair.com) and Autumn Fair Birmingham (autumnfair.com), which may impress retailers by whom you would like to be stocked.

SUPPLYING ARTWORK

- An alternative route to making your own designs and having them printed is approaching a greetings card publisher. There are around 800 in the UK – research which are likely to accept your style of work. Visit a variety of shops; the individual stores on

the high street as well as newsagents, bookshops and department stores.

- Approach publishers initially by asking how they like to receive freelance pitches, including the resolution and types of files to send.
- Make sure that you always post copies, not original artwork, to publishers.
- Bear in mind that it is not good practice to offer the same kind of designs to different companies. This threatens to compromise each one's distinctiveness and could damage your integrity as an artist.

SOURCEBOOK

Greeting Card Association – *the body representing the industry since 1919* (greetingcardassociation.org.uk)

Writers & Artists – *offers an online guide for those wishing to have their work published and produces the famous yearbook containing advice and contacts* (writersandartists.co.uk)

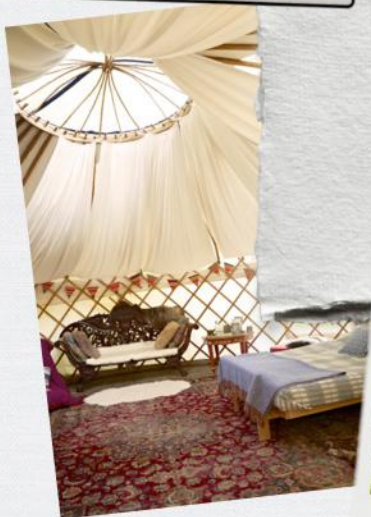
Progressive Greetings Worldwide Magazine – *the leading trade publication* (progressivegreetings.co.uk)

SEW • COOK • WRITE • DRAW • MAKE • GROW



FINDING A

*support
network*



Finding a support network

When you first have the idea to start your own business, find other like-minded people who are more experienced and they will soon be vital components in your success

WORDS BY CAROLE ANN RICE

Unless those close to you are also entrepreneurial, you may find your enthusiasm falls on less than fertile ground. They will offer words of caution and may question your staying power, while colleagues may even feel threatened by your wild dream and what it means about their choice to settle.

PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE

As loved ones may feel it's their duty to talk you out of setting up your own business or offer critical feedback, you need to find your tribe – the people who truly get your vision, have that same wild look in their eyes and who'll cheer you on and support you when your knees wobble and times get tough.

Consider hiring an expert.

A coach can help you to keep focused, get clarity, plan your goals and create strategies to achieve them and offer unconditional support with no agenda. A business mentor is someone who has taken the same journey you are about to embark on and can share best practice and explain the process and the pitfalls of

the enterprise you are creating. As many as 70 per cent of small businesses have the assistance of a mentor and 97 per cent of those describe it as 'valuable', according to statistics from business software company Sage. Contact Association of Business Mentors (associationofbusinessmentors.org).

Seek out a good bank manager. They will offer sound advice on interest

rates and financial planning and choose an accountant who talks your language, doesn't befuddle with legalese and will help you receive tax allowances.

Use a virtual assistant (VA).

If you lack confidence with technology, spreadsheets and admin, this could be the solution. It is like having your own PA and you are charged only for the period of time that you use the service

(typically, it costs £25-£40 per hour and you pay on a monthly basis). The VA can help you update your website, chase and send invoices, manage your diary and book events for you so that you are free to do what you do best. They also make you look professional; handling phone calls and queries when you are out of the office and covering for you when you have a well-earned break.

ENTERPRISING WAYS TO USE YOUR TIME

- 10 MINS** Go through business cards you've been given and email people to arrange a coffee catch-up to get to know more about what they do and vice versa.
- 30 MINS** Identify weaknesses in your skill set. Think about delegating this work, so you can focus on what you do best. Download the People Per Hour app, which offers marketeers, writers, designers and more freelancers at reduced rates.
- 60 MINS** As an alternative to hiring people to help, you could plan some skills swaps with other networkers. You're likely to have a range of different strengths.

THE BEAUTY OF NETWORKING

This can be a very powerful way of building your business, raising your profile and marketing yourself. The benefits are:

- You have the chance to meet like-minded people who can support you
- Receiving referrals and raising your profile
- Creating a circle of influence, so you also hone and develop your business and learn from others
- Developing new skills with which to build your business
- An end to entrepreneurial isolation as you discover

As many as 70 per cent of small businesses have the assistance of a mentor and 97 per cent of those describe it as 'valuable', according to statistics from business software company Sage

inspiring new friends and cheerleaders

Networking isn't an opportunity for hard sell but to be curious about others, how you can help and refer them on and for people to learn more about what you do. Most groups seem intimidating at first but they can become a fun and friendly way to market yourself if you put in the effort.

JOINING THE CLUB

There is a vast array of networking groups out there. Breakfast clubs such as BNI (bni.co.uk) are fast paced and demand you bring in new visitors, whereas morning ones including Fabulous Women (fabulous-women.co.uk) and lunchtime gatherings such as The Athena Network (theathenanetwork.co.uk) tend to be more accessible. Evening clubs offer a different vibe, often with alcohol. How to choose? Decide which time and day of the month suits you best, then if it's easy to get to and whether you receive a friendly welcome. Most groups allow several visitor options before

becoming a member, so it's a good idea to shop around. However, if you can't afford the membership or there is nothing in your area that suits you, create your own and arrange meetings in a café.

PITCH PERFECT

It's built into British DNA that we don't like to brag about what we do. At networking events you are often required to give your one-minute elevator pitch (describing your business in as much time as it takes to travel a few floors in a lift) and it can feel daunting. However, it's important to get used to this. Be proud of what you do, flag up how you are different and ask for a call to action such as signing up to your newsletter, trying free products or joining a loyalty or reward scheme for referrals. People are genuinely interested in learning more about what you do. Take the opportunity to make contacts and don't be afraid to ask for guidance – someone out there knows a person who can help you, or something that can smooth the way for your start-up.

SEW • COOK • WRITE • DRAW • MAKE • GROW



CASE STUDY: IDENTIFYING A MENTOR

In 2002, Alison Howells started Foottrails (foottrails.co.uk), a business offering walking tours in the South West. After a couple of years, she was feeling bogged down and the company wasn't moving in the direction she wanted it to. A keen networker, Alison knew that she could rely on her fellow women in business for day-to-day support, but felt she now needed a mentor; someone to guide her gently, to bounce ideas off and to challenge her. It was halfway through the business seminar at the WiRE (Women in Rural Enterprise) National Conference that she realised she had found who she was looking for. Seizing the moment, she approached the speaker: "I was absolutely terrified," she says. "She was a successful high-profile entrepreneur. I was sure she would brush me off, but she didn't.

"Having her as my mentor has made a huge difference to the business. We talk every month or so, she offers an insight that I don't get anywhere else, she listens without judging and brings her vast experience to any situation – most of all, she is invested emotionally in my success.

"Choose your mentor carefully. Don't settle for the first person, though; make opportunities to listen to people outside of your usual business circle. You'll know who the right mentor is when you meet them."



THE LAMPSHADE DESIGNER

LET THERE BE LIGHT

An experiment in the art of papercutting led Hannah Nunn to create a brilliant range of lamps and open her own specialist emporium with the help of a dedicated team

WORDS BY KATE LANGRISH ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALUN CALLENDER



With a few precise cuts, some soft etching and layers of paper silhouettes, Hannah Nunn has pared back the delicate forms of grasses, ferns and seedheads to a clean, distinctive style that decorates her lampshades. A batch of designs sits stacked in her Hebden Bridge studio in West Yorkshire; they are striking in their own right, but when the sun streams through the windows of this former textile mill, they come to life – illuminated and beautiful.

Light is central to Hannah's work, although it took her a while to realise this. After studying crafts at Carmarthen College of Art and Design, her career was put on hold to raise her children – Ffion, now 20, and Euan, 19. "I was a young mum but also a frustrated artist, so when Euan started pre-school, I decided to rent a studio for a few hours a week," she explains. "I didn't really know what I was going to do, but when I was kitting out the space, I bought a cutting mat and sharp knife, and just started playing about. I loved the precision of the blade and the way I could create intricate shapes with it."

Hannah had moved to Hebden Bridge in 1999, primarily for the schools, but was delighted to find a thriving creative community there, and shared an area ➔





"IT TOOK SIX MONTHS OF SKETCHING DESIGNS AND SOURCING ELEMENTS TO COME UP WITH A PROTOTYPE"

in Northlight Art Studios, housed in another of the town's former mills, with a group of artists: "At first, I made greetings cards based on houses in the town, even cutting out the roof tiles. They were lovely and Liberty agreed to stock them but the process was so time-consuming, they were never going to make any money."

THE LIGHTBULB MOMENT

It was when Hannah held one of the silhouettes for a card up to the window that a fellow craftsman asked whether she'd thought about making lights. "Of course, I refer to that as my lightbulb moment!" she says. "I applied to the Arts Council for a grant to research the idea. It took six months of sketching designs and sourcing elements to come up with a prototype."

The first lamp wasn't a great success. "It was very unattractive – made with lining paper and coloured gels placed over a milk bottle with a lightbulb stuck in it. But it had potential." She looked at endless

paper samples until she found one that created the right cosy glow but wouldn't ignite if the lamp was knocked over, and tracked down plastic poppers to clip the lamps together. Crucially, she discovered it was light, and not colour, that was her medium: "When I abandoned the gels and just used shadows and light – layering paper and creating silhouettes instead – I realised I had the effect I was after."

The initial lamps were cut by hand, so the designs had to be simple, but Hannah then invested in software that translates her drawings into patterns a laser cutter can follow. "It's amazing how delicate and intricate the results are, and it can etch paper to create a tonal effect I simply couldn't achieve by hand," she adds. Now her desk drawers are filled with A3 sheets of dainty allium stems and dandelion clocks, which she layers onto the shades before laminating and fastening them.

In 2003, she took her lamps to the British Craft Trade Fair to find stockists around the UK for her work, but couldn't help being drawn to the stands of other lighting artists. "I think there's something so magical about this type of work," she explains. "At the time, the studio I was renting was relocating, as the building had been bought by developers. I'd always had a fantasy about owning a shop and when I saw all these wonderful artisans, it struck me that I could run a lighting emporium."

And so began Radiance, Hannah's store in Hebden Bridge. "I approached people at the fair, asking to stock their work. I don't think they realised I didn't yet have a premises!" Back home, plans fell into place as her neighbour, cabinet maker Bernard McNally, offered her a space he owned around the corner from her house and helped make shop fittings. Hannah filled it with her own designs, alongside those of other artists, including Amy







"MY WALKS GIVE ME NEW IDEAS FOR CAPTURING THE BEAUTY OF PLANT FORMS USING LIGHT AND SHADE"



Cooper and Colin Chetwood, and set up her studio in the back. After five years, she moved into the current premises on Market Street but found, as the business thrived, that she had less time for her own work. So she sought out a studio space nearby and established a new routine: "Tuesday is design and ideas day, from Wednesday to Friday I put the lamps together and on Saturday I'm in the shop (Matthew Easby runs it for me in the week)." On Fridays Hannah goes for a walk with photographer friend and studio sharer Sarah Mason: "We take pictures and collect seasonal finds for inspiration."

A NATURAL PROGRESSION

An online business course done on 'brainstorm Tuesdays' sparked another idea, and in 2013 Hannah branched out into wallpaper design: "I realised I'm a pattern maker, so taking my favourite motifs from the lamps – meadow grasses and leaves – and putting them into repeat was a natural progression." One of the few remaining UK specialist manufacturers, Anstey Wallpaper Company, produces her designs using a traditional 'gravure' method in which the pattern is etched onto a steel cylinder that is then rolled over the paper. Hannah's Paper Meadow, Beech Leaves and In The Tall Grass designs are now available in a palette of appealing nature-inspired hues.

She is now also working on a range of fabrics. "I'd like to use them to make drum shades, so the material is important as it has to look good when the light's turned off but give the right glow when it's on." Her business is set to grow but not, she says, at a pace that means she doesn't have time for her Friday walks: "They give me new ideas for capturing the beauty of plant forms using light and shade." With such an elegantly simple approach, Hannah's designs look set to continue to capture the art of nature.

i *Radiance, 26 Market Street, Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire (01422 845764; hannahmunn.co.uk).*



Q&A

HANNAH NUNN

Did yours first seem like a realistic business idea?

Initially, it didn't matter. I had just a couple of hours a day to work, but as my youngest went to nursery, it was half a day and soon a full school day. My pastime turned into a business as my children grew up.

Did your feelings about your hobby change when it turned into a business?

Even when the creative side becomes a little repetitive, I still feel productive every day. However, one challenge is keeping room for designing. When the orders are coming in thick and fast, you have to make, make, make to keep up, so the designing takes a back seat, but it's essential to your growth as an artist.

What is your support network like?

It's brilliant and has developed alongside my business. I live in a small town that's full of independent shops and artists and has a good community spirit. Also, I have attended the British Craft Trade Fair for so many years and have met many like-minded designers along the way and we all tend to look after one another.

Where did you seek help when you were starting out?

Early on I rented a cheap little studio in a big communal space. Everyone there was at a different stage but we would



"TAKE BABY STEPS
TOWARDS YOUR GOAL
AND CELEBRATE THE
SMALL SUCCESSES
– ONE WILL LEAD
TO ANOTHER"

Have you made any sacrifices?

Not having much money in the beginning was rather challenging. Talking to the children as adults now, they tell me that I set an example to them by following my heart. What seemed to be a sacrifice at the time actually turned out to be a blessing.

What's the best advice you've been given?

To not wear your busyness as a badge of honour. That changed the way I approached things and what I would consider saying yes to.

How do you compete with larger retailers?

I don't try to look like a big business; I am professional, but on my own terms. I'm open about my artistic practice because I want people to know who I am. Customers feel part of something that is growing and they like supporting that process, which I love.

What's your proudest moment so far?

When I launched my wallpaper collection.

Do you have any advice for others just starting out?

Take baby steps towards your goal and celebrate the small successes – one will lead to another. At first, I was passionate about crafting intricate paper-cut cards, but that led me on to lighting, which forged my whole career.

WORDS FROM THE WISE



Sophie Conran, homeware designer and business founder

“It is important to work with the best people. Spend time with those who are facing the same kinds of challenges. I have a number of friends with their own businesses and I am very lucky that all members of my family do, too, and so have experienced the highs and lows and similar problems that I might be going through. Some entrepreneurs are very good at networking, which is a great way to find support – go out and meet people; talk to them. Follow your interests and doors will be opened.” *sophieconran.com*



SPARE-TIME START-UP

WORKING AROUND EXISTING COMMITMENTS

MAKE ACCESSORIES FOR
THE HOME

FACT FILE

NAME Miesje Chafer**AGE** 32**LIVES IN** Portsmouth**SPECIALISES IN**Screen-printed textiles
and accessories
(07596 076762;
miesjechafer.com)

FOR FOUR YEARS, when Miesje Chafer wasn't helping to save lives in her role as a junior sister on an emergency assessment unit, she could be found at her sewing machine, surrounded by piles of her own brightly coloured, screen-printed fabrics. "I wanted a creative outlet that would help me switch off, so in 2010 I attended a three-day screen-printing course. I was hooked," Miesje says. "I went home and started playing around with patterns, asking friends for feedback, then using the material for my own projects. Soon, I was being asked to make gifts and my hobby organically grew into a business."

It wasn't long before she finally took the plunge, quit her job, moved from Oxford to Southsea in Portsmouth and became self-employed, turning her spare-time fashion and home accessories business into a fully fledged enterprise. "Relocating to an area where the property is cheaper enabled me to become self-employed and

was one of the best decisions I've made," Miesje says. In her new studio, one of several artists' spaces in a former sorting office in Eastleigh, she transforms her fabric designs into purses, cushions and lampshades, which she sells at fairs and markets nationwide.

To set up her spare-time enterprise, Miesje created a WordPress website and signed up to Twitter. "I've since switched to Squarespace.com, as I find it much simpler to use and it provided everything I needed from a website so I haven't had to pay someone to do it for me. I also use Instagram because it's much more visual than Twitter and therefore better for showing my work."

She also began selling at local fairs and through an online marketplace. "Taking part in *Country Living* Magazine's Pop-up Market was a turning point, because it gave me the confidence to approach independent retailers," she reveals. "I now supply a number of shops wholesale, including the knitting supplies store Loop."

Miesje gets particular satisfaction from her newfound independence: "My old job was governed by rules and protocols, so running my own business gives me a real sense of freedom."





TIP Browse an online directory of British craftspeople and their shops, be inspired by fellow creatives, find business advice and discover events and exhibitions in your area and nationwide at ukhandmade.co.uk.

ENTERPRISING WAYS TO USE YOUR TIME

10 MINS **Write online entries**
So your items are ready to sell as soon as possible, start producing simple descriptions of them, including composition, size, colour and price.

30 MINS **Get snapping**
Bring your products to life by photographing them in appropriate settings – scarves hanging on coat pegs, cushions on a sofa, and throws on a bed. This can help customers visualise them in their own home.

60+ MINS **Prepare stock**
It is better to have plenty of items available than a backlog of frustrated customers, so be sure to include easy-to-make, but high-quality, smaller items or accessories in your collection.

MIESJE'S SPARE-TIME START-UP TIP: at first, approach small-shop owners with whom you can build a relationship and become more confident. Once you have this experience, you are then in a better position to try larger retailers.



THE GLAMPING SITE OWNERS

HEAVENLY HIDEAWAYS

A sense of adventure and plenty of determination drove one couple to change their lives and offer dream holidays on the wild side

WORDS BY KITTIE CORRIGAN • PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALIUS CALLENDER







When Sarah Heyworth and John McKenzie-Murdoch left the bright lights of Brighton in a motorhome with all their worldly possessions and two dogs, they had no idea where they would end up living. But they had one goal in mind – to create a place for people to stay that offered an authentic back-to-nature experience.

Previously, Sarah had run her own marketing business promoting cultural events and John had trained conservation volunteers. Their life-changing moment had occurred when they took a three-month sabbatical in 2004 and travelled around Europe in a camper van. On returning home, they both craved the open road and the freedom that starting their own business would provide. At the time they had plenty of commitments – mainly to clients and staff – and although they had decided what their dream job would be, they had little idea of how to go about it and, crucially, had not

found suitable premises. But nonetheless, feeling undaunted and ready for a challenge, they handed in their notice, sold their house, secured a bank loan, packed up their camper van and set out.

Their first stop was a camping and caravan site in the Lake District, where they worked as second in command for six months learning the ropes. “It was invaluable experience,” Sarah says. “We found out about general maintenance, emergency repairs and guests arriving late. The reality is that you are never in total control.”

Meanwhile, they searched for a site that would provide just the right amount of

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wilderness, sending out hundreds of letters to B&B owners asking if they were thinking of selling. It was a lengthy process but it paid off when a promising reply arrived from Graig Wen, whose owners wanted to retire. Positioned in the south of Snowdonia between Arthog and Abergwynant, the 45-acre site sat at the foot of towering mountains, including Islawrdref, and stretched to the sandy Mawddach estuary with views across the water to Cadair Idris. Originally a Victorian slate mill, Graig Wen included a campsite, a B&B (The Slate Shed), pitches for eight motorhomes and four self-catering cottages. This was an intimidating proposition and more than Sarah and John had planned to take on, but, seduced by the beauty and seclusion of the area, they couldn't resist and in 2007 they bought the business in its entirety.

The first season was spent on renovations – “There were a lot of orange walls to paint white,” Sarah remembers



– but they had to start earning money and so opened one holiday cottage in time for Christmas. John has learned a lot about rural plumbing since the move. “I am in charge of blocked drains,” he jokes. A course he took at the Centre for Alternative Technology at Machynlleth enabled him to build a compost toilet for campers (there are conventional loos and showers, too), while Sarah studied dry-stone walling so that she could repair a stretch on their land. They have both mastered new skills that surprised them, “Considering we arrived with all our tools in a biscuit tin,” says John, who also cooks breakfast for ten – including meat from ‘sausage Sue’ and eggs from their own hens – at the B&B.

Local labour and products also played an important role. “The Welsh slate floor was laid by a father-and-son team,” John explains. “It took a huge slice of our budget but it was a good investment. It’s great to know it came from Blaenau



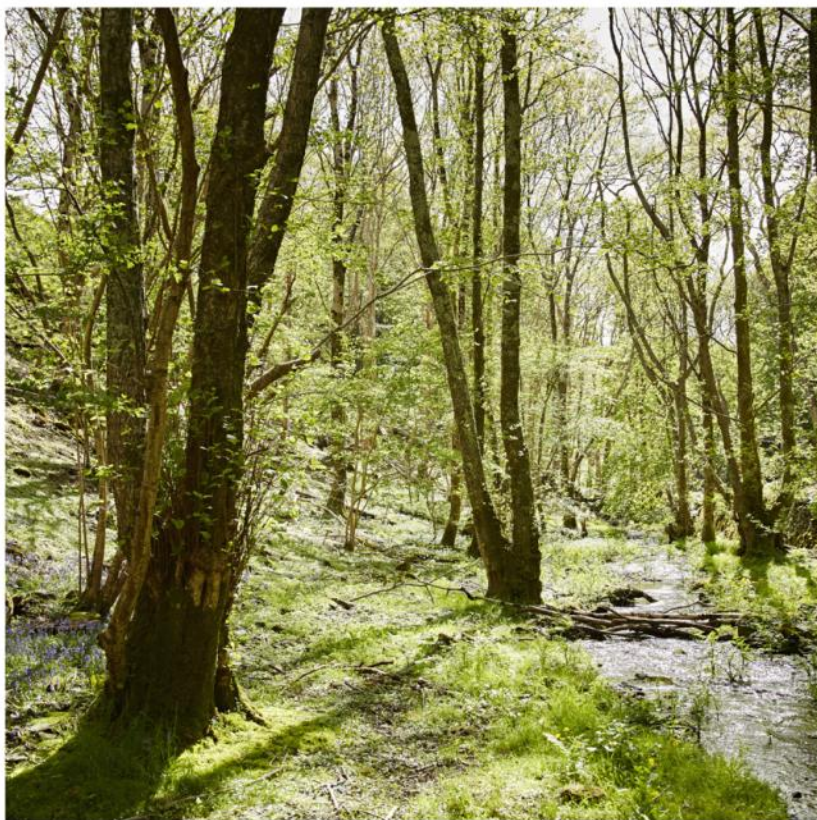
OLD SCHOOL DESKS ACT AS OCCASIONAL TABLES, AND WELSH BLANKETS ADD TO THE MODERN COUNTRY STYLE

Ffestiniog rather than from Spain. The rustic tables and chairs were made by two South African hippies we met, and friends helped with hand-painting the slate name plates on the rooms, which are called after Welsh bands we like.” Old school desks act as occasional tables, and the Welsh blankets, cushions and artworks add to the modern country style.

John’s father (chief washer-upper) and Sarah’s mother (seamstress supreme) moved to be near them and regularly help out. “They realised they would never see us otherwise,” Sarah says. They also employ a housekeeper, Julie, and a receptionist, Sian, plus use extra casual help in high season.

Since opening, the couple have added two luxury yurts and a Welsh ‘caban’ (a traditional wooden pavilion where quarrymen would socialise), tucked into secluded nooks and crannies on their site. In peak season, Graig Wen can now accommodate 100 guests – a secret of ➔





their success is that visitors can choose to get away from it all in basic or luxury accommodation, with various grades in between. "One summer," Sarah remembers, "I saw a family pushing a wheelbarrow of food up the hill from the campsite to share a barbecue with their 94-year-old great-grandmother, who was staying in our ground-floor B&B room."

Although guests can simply sit back and enjoy the sights, Sarah says it's a misconception that running a B&B means the owners get to put their feet up after breakfast until the evening guests arrive: "As well as housekeeping, tidying the campsite and stocking up on food and logs, there is the website to update, bookings to process and all the extra touches such as picking fresh flowers for the rooms."

The beautiful landscape offers a variety of activities, ticking the boxes for everyone from mountain bikers and adrenalin sports enthusiasts to walkers



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and foodies. "There are good places to eat (saltmarsh lamb is a local speciality) five miles away in Dolgellau, which is known for its independent shops," Sarah says. "Or guests can walk, climb and cycle, go zip-lining along the quarry, take a steam train up Snowdon, explore castles and swim in the sea."

It's these breathtaking surroundings that also provide respite for Sarah and John, giving them a break from the hectic life of running Graig Wen and showing them why they chose to pack up their campervan and leave Brighton in the first place. As Sarah says, "No matter how busy it gets, walking our dogs Gracie and Bryn along the estuary, with the mountains towering over us and shelducks and egrets on the water, is always the perfect reminder of why we moved here."

i *Graig Wen, Arthog, Dolgellau, Gwynedd (01341 250482; graiqwen.co.uk; slateshed.co.uk).*



Q&A

SARAH HEYWORTH & JOHN MCKENZIE-MURDOCH, GRAIG WEN

Is there anything you wish you'd known before starting?

If you anticipated every challenge or problem you'd have to face, you might never start out. A certain amount of naive enthusiasm can make you bold enough to take a leap into the unknown.

What kind of help did you seek in the beginning?

In terms of developing a professional approach, we benefited from doing hands-on work experience at a camping and caravanning club site. For the first year we also had the assistance of a business advisor funded by the Welsh Assembly.

How do you make your glamping site stand out?

It's often the little extras that people remember. We help them make the most of their holiday by giving thoughtful suggestions for places to visit, provide breakfast croissants, hampers with local sausages, cheese and Welsh cider, and packed lunches complete with Sarah's dad's homemade chutney. And our guests are transported to their pitches in style: on the quad bike!

Who has helped you the most, and how?

We've needed the help of so many people – professionals, trusted suppliers and loved ones – that it's difficult to pick one out. It was essential for



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our cash flow that we were able to open the business just six months after moving in. We'd never have done it without the support of friends and family. From major landscaping work and painting to web design and IT, they gave us their time and in return we could offer them a lovely place to come on holiday.

Have you built a team?

Recruiting, managing and keeping staff who share your passion is one challenge of having a small, seasonal business in a rural area. We find lovely people, but we can't offer them full-time jobs. We

would never have managed to open when we did, though, without them all.

How did you cope with all the essential admin?

Our local council officers visited and pointed us in the right direction, but there are many online resources. We joined the tourism association for this area, which was a great source of advice, and enabled us to network.

Any surprises along the way?

How extraordinarily different and varied we are as human beings. We meet people from all walks of life here. Many have interesting experiences to share and are very kind, honest and open. Just the other day, I was given a pot of delicious homemade marmalade by a camper.

What have you learned about the industry since starting?

It's fast moving, so you need to be flexible and move forward or risk getting left behind. When we first opened, hardly any smaller campsites had online booking systems and there were no websites such as TripAdvisor. Now people expect to reserve their pitches via the internet, and read reviews on peer sites.

What's the best lesson you've learned?

A smile and a friendly face go a long way.

Being the perfect host

An increasing number of people are choosing to holiday in the UK, so tourism is big business. Accommodation is the fastest-growing part of the sector, making this the perfect time to join the industry. Careful planning and marketing will have holidaymakers beating a path to your door



WORDS BY FIONA DAVIES BUSINESS MANAGER, WOMEN IN RURAL ENTERPRISE (WIREUK.ORG)

FINDING YOUR GUESTS

- Know your customers. Who are they? Do they come from Britain or overseas? What will motivate them to book a break? What is their idea of a perfect holiday? Market research in the early days will make a huge difference to your occupancy rates and help you target your advertising.
- Ensure your website is regularly updated with numerous photos, videos and testimonials, and that it also includes 'share with a friend' buttons. Guests will expect to see availability and reserve a room or space online; there are many booking platforms available (search 'online holiday booking system'). Alternatively, you can use a holiday directory service (such as premiercottages.co.uk), but this can be expensive as it includes much of the marketing, too.
- Spend time optimising your website so people can find you easily – consider using some pay-per-click advertising (google.co.uk/adwords).
- Invest in social media – Pinterest has the highest rate of viewing to buying/booking; pin everything from fluffy



towels to local sausages for breakfast so you capture the full experience. Instagram will showcase your venue and let your images be shared easily.

AT THEIR SERVICE

- Be realistic and try not to spread yourself too thinly. There will be pinch points, especially during the short summer season – make sure you have trusted staff who

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share your ethics and are well trained.

- You need to be ruthless with bookings. Don't be tempted to squeeze another one in – the impact of over-crowding and diluting your service will be felt by guests.
- Keep an up-to-date record of other local accommodation providers that you trust – when you're fully booked, visitors will appreciate recommendations based on your knowledge.
- Finally, be prepared to have your life disrupted during the peak months – recharge your batteries during quieter times so you can face the new season full of energy.

THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

- When it comes to holidays, one size doesn't fit all. Even though holidaymakers are in the same place at the same time, their expectations will be different. Gather as much advance information as you can (ideally, there will be questions on the website when your guests book) and offer as many different options as is feasible; everything from breakfast in bed to splendid isolation. Glean practical information such as the local bus service timetable and

be prepared to suggest an itinerary for those who wish to see as much of the area as possible and have activity-packed days during their stay.

- Team up with nearby service providers and producers to offer a complete experience from food to attractions; with a limited time to spend assimilating themselves to the area, guests will appreciate your local knowledge.
- To offer a fantastic holiday, everything you do must have the guest at heart – it's their holiday, not yours, so take time to listen, understand and respond accordingly.

SOURCEBOOK

Bed and Breakfast Academy – *no-nonsense advice and support* (bedandbreakfastacademy.co.uk)

Bed & Breakfast Association – *supports B&B and guest-house owners* (bandbassociation.org)

Tourism Alliance – *industry trade body with support and helpful news* (tourismalliance.com)

Visit Britain – *promoting Britain as a tourist destination worldwide* (visitbritain.org)



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ACHIEVING A
*work-
life
balance*

Achieving a work-life balance

Creating a business is so all-consuming that you will want to give it every minute of your day, but don't forget that life outside of work will need equal attention

WORDS BY CAROLE ANN RICE

While you may dream of being dressed in head-to-toe Boden, blossoming in your new self-employed guise and taking plenty of mini-breaks, the reality is that people setting up their own enterprise can end up putting in long hours without a break, hunched over their laptop working into the night and over weekends, eschewing holidays and neglecting their health and happiness. However, you are the engine driving it all forward, so it's essential to maintain yourself – do so by setting certain limits.

Plan your working day as you would if you went out to a job. Decide on when you will start and finish and draw a line under it, so tasks don't seep into the evenings, too. Building in breaks for exercise, healthy snacks, contemplation and meditation is more productive than an exhausting grind during which you're not at your most efficient.

STARTING OFF SLOWLY

If you're launching a business while in employment, be



realistic about what can be achieved and by when. Consider allotting an hour per night or every Saturday morning. Be patient and set sensible goals for each week or month. It takes time to create an enterprise.

Have a designated space. Though you may have had your business idea at the kitchen table, it probably

isn't a very practical place to develop it, so set up an office area elsewhere (see *Creating the Perfect Working Environment*). Also learn to switch off each night – no ordering stationery, banking or fiddling with your website from your bed.

THE GROUND RULES

We need professional boundaries for ourselves and others. This means honouring your time and not allowing people, events or situations to invade your space or distract you from your purpose. Friends dropping by for coffee may need to be told you can't be disturbed. Instead, arrange social events so work and play are made room for. Similarly, make sure that children or partners know they are not allowed to mess up your desk, take your stationery or freely interrupt you. Stick to your guidelines and others will, too.

EXTREME SELF-CARE

Creating healthy habits will mean your business thrives

ENTERPRISING WAYS TO USE YOUR TIME

- 10 MINS** Get your diary out for the next fortnight and factor in exercise, admin and planning, social events and days off. Eliminate any unnecessary appointments you have to do in person – offer Skype meetings instead.
- 30 MINS** Do it, dump it or delegate it – don't get lost in admin, clutter and confusion. Clear as you go, throw things away and set up systems that work. To create action boards for short- and long-term tasks, see trello.com.
- 60 MINS** If you find you're procrastinating over an onerous task and the same things seem to be on your to-do list each day, have a power hour. Make that follow-up call, tackle the dull paperwork, sort the IT problem and then give yourself a treat afterwards.

In a survey of 1,000 female entrepreneurs, 75% said they had a better work-life balance, 78% enjoyed greater independence and 66% noted an increase in confidence since starting a venture

as you do, so plan daily rituals that will support and nourish you.

- Eat fresh food, drink plenty of water, take breaks for walks or exercise and power naps.
 - Create a realistic working day such as 9am-6pm
 - Have non-screen time – shut down the PC, laptop or iPad and stop checking emails on your phone at least two hours before bed to unwind
 - Allow opportunities to go shopping, visit a gallery, have a massage or just stare at the wall
 - Build 'white space' into your diary for planning, catching up and creative thinking
 - Equip yourself – invest in a good chair and desk, and the latest technology, equipment and systems in order to be more productive
- In the long term, running your own business should be about gaining more time, freedom and greater choices and not about being chained to your desk in a gloomy room never seeing daylight or loved ones.

It's also important to inhabit your brand. If you

make beauty products or work in the wellbeing industry, for example, look well-groomed and healthy. Consider the message you are sending out with your appearance and energy. It pays to invest in a good professional wardrobe that creatively reflects who you are and what you do.

BEWARE PERFECTIONISM

If you're not happy until everything is 100 per cent, if you over-think, over-work and spend too long on small tasks, it's tiring. Aim for progress, not perfection. Vince Stanzione in his bestselling book *The Millionaire Dropout* (John Wiley & Sons, £12) says that, initially, we invest too much time in the details – logo, colours, branding, websites – when we can always upgrade these things down the line. Don't become stuck in 'analysis paralysis' and, as he advises, "Just get open for business and start making money," rather than deliberating over whether your stationery border should be cerise or purple.

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CASE STUDY: OUTSOURCING EFFECTIVELY

Claudi & Fin (claudiandfin.co.uk) founders Lucy Woodhouse and Meriel Kehoe have grown their frozen yogurt lolly business from the kitchen table to a flourishing enterprise with their products stocked in supermarkets. They put their success partly down to paying for help as and when they need to. For them, the key benefits of this approach are:

- Budget control. It enables you to manage finances more effectively and only pay for what you need, when you need it – essential when you're starting out.
- Time management. You can't do everything yourself and having a pool of talented, like-minded people gives you the confidence to step back.
- Flexibility. It is possible to turn outsourcing on and off as you wish. You may not want extra help if it is a difficult month financially or you have more time to do things yourself. If you're finding it difficult to reach a decision about which option to choose, see the website marketplace.enterprisenation.com, which has a network of more than 12,500 rated and reviewed advisers. They are also able to cover a range of other topics, from finance to digital marketing.



THE CLEANING QUEEN

SOAP STAR

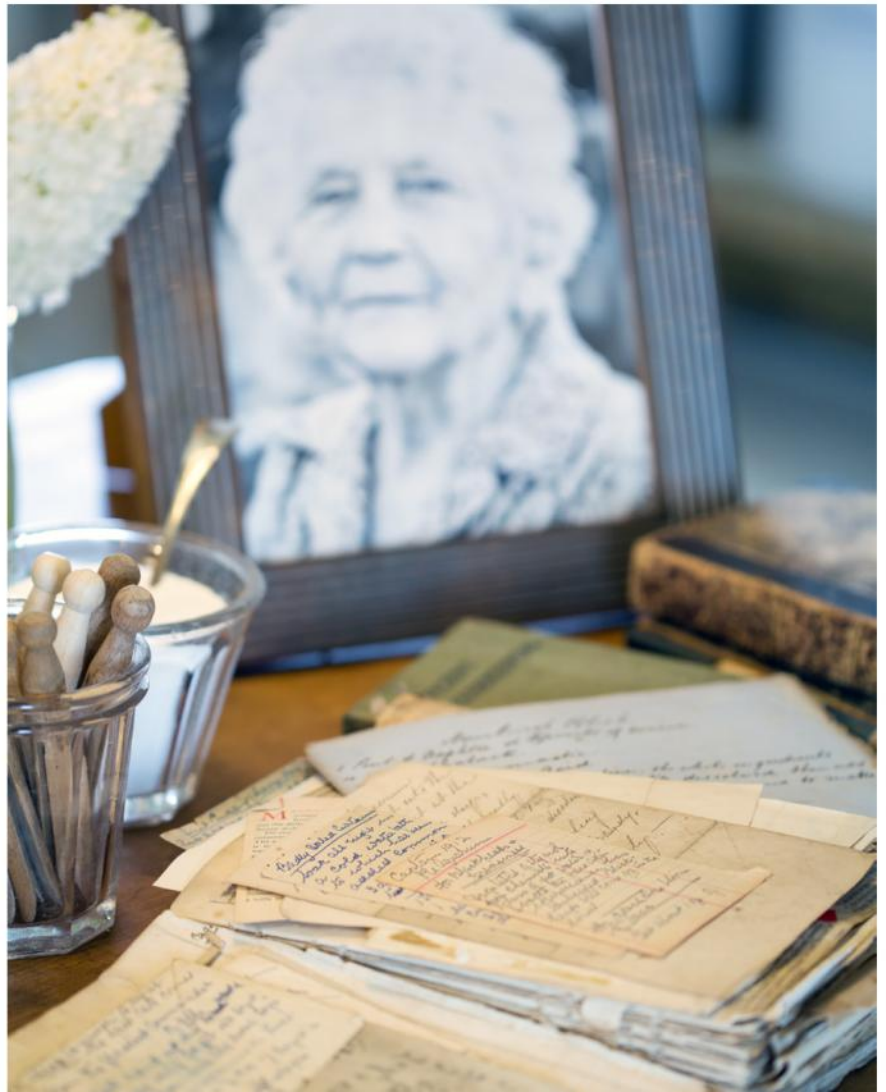
Inspired by the traditional recipes of a former housekeeper, Vanessa Willes has worked tirelessly to build an enterprise making natural remedies using simple, sustainable and safe ingredients

WORDS BY KATE LANGRISH ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY RACHEL WARNE

In the two years of experimenting with recipes before the launch of Mangle & Wringer natural cleaning products, Vanessa Willes experienced some disasters. "I hadn't realised that the kitchen spray needed to ferment and, one day, four 50-litre tubs of it exploded," she recalls.

She had been given lists of ingredients but, crucially, not the method by Bette Smith, who inspired the range, based on her experience in service from the age of 14. Over the years, Bette had collected cleaning tips and solutions, which she wrote down in journals and passed on to Vanessa before she died in 2009 at the age of 89. "Bette always thought that we clean too much," Vanessa says. "Nowadays, we are over-run with products we don't need – air fresheners, washing powders for whites, colours and delicates, and cleaning sprays for every room of the house."

As part of her market research, Vanessa conducted a poll to find out the average number of bottles kept under the kitchen sink. The answer was 62. There are just nine Mangle & Wringer products – a traditional bar soap, all-purpose spray, kitchen cleanser, bathroom balm, glass cleaner, furniture polish, washing-up ↻



liquid, laundry powder and natural bleach – and between them they cover every cleaning job imaginable. Each is based on Bette's own concoctions.

Vanessa, 53, moved to the Cotswolds from Battersea in 1996, when she met her husband, Tim. An architectural and interior designer, she commuted to London every day – leaving early, returning late, and juggling work with two young children. Then, one morning in 2001, she couldn't get out of bed. "I was completely floored, and ached in every muscle and joint," explains Vanessa, who was later diagnosed with ME, or chronic fatigue syndrome. "There's no treatment, so I set about changing my life. I started eating only organic meat and vegetables, and gave up work."

Bette, then 83, came to help Vanessa around the house for a couple of hours each week while she recovered, and they hit it off at once. "Bette didn't believe in microwaves or ready meals – she grew her own vegetables and made everything from scratch, including her cleaning products," Vanessa says. "She believed that, in order to get well again, I needed to occupy my mind and so she taught me how to make soap."

Bette left her home in Gloucestershire for London in 1934 with a bag and her mother's recipe for soap. Working her way up from kitchen maid to housekeeper and then lady's maid, she moved back to the Cotswolds on retirement and set up a laundry business, where she continued to amass what she called 'cleaning remedies'.

GETTING IT RIGHT

In contrast to the long list of chemicals in many modern-day cleansers, the Mangle & Wringer ingredients menu is very short – but that's not to say the products weren't tricky to recreate. Vanessa tinkered and tested again and again until they were just right. "For a while, I just gave them to friends as presents, but people kept saying that I should start a business. When Tim, who's a builder, even commented on



VANESSA TINKERED AND TESTED AGAIN AND AGAIN UNTIL
HER CHEMICAL-FREE PRODUCTS WERE JUST RIGHT



how good the laundry powder was at getting stains out of his work clothes, I decided to look into it a bit more."

It took two years and a loan of £5,000 before Vanessa started selling her products in 2012. Her brother designed the website, and production began in the garden shed. "When she ran her laundry, Bette was known locally as Mrs Mangle, and her daughter, who worked there, was called Little Miss Wringer – hence the name," Vanessa explains. Starting to sell locally in farm shops and delis, as well as online, orders quickly picked up. She began by making 20kg of soap a week, but is now producing 250kg. The rapid growth has meant a steep learning curve for Vanessa: "I'd never run a business before, so I went on a Cotswold Women in Business course, which helped to give me more confidence. I quickly realised that you mustn't be scared of accepting advice wherever you can get it. For example, when my chef ➞





"THERE ARE UP TO 52 INGREDIENTS IN MANY
LAUNDRY POWDERS – OURS HAS SIX"



friend pointed out that I didn't need to grate kilos of soap by hand each week – there are machines that can do it!"

In November 2013, Vanessa outgrew her shed and moved her workshop to a converted old barn just outside Moreton-in-Marsh. Although all the essential equipment, including graters and blenders, is now in place, the products themselves are still made by hand and natural soap is the basis of nearly all of them. It's created using the cold processed method, where Fairtrade coconut oil is mixed with lye, in this case sodium hydroxide, to create a glycerine-based soap, which is then left to cure for a month in old apple crates. "In commercial soap production, they take the glycerine out and sell it, but we leave it in – it means that you don't need to use fabric softener with the laundry powder."

Standing at the reclaimed bench in her workshop, Vanessa grates blocks of soap and combines these in a blender with

natural bleach and sodium carbonate (a natural softener) to create the skin-friendly laundry powder. She then moves over to the large vats on the floor, mixing the juice and oil of freshly cut lemons ("Bette's secret recipe") with distilled white vinegar and leaving it to ferment. In a month's time, it will be mixed with her soap to create Spray and Go.

A FLEXIBLE WAY OF WORKING

"There are up to 52 ingredients in many laundry powders – ours has six," Vanessa says. "There are no artificial perfumes; I only include essential oils that serve a cleaning purpose, and so our products don't have a strong fragrance. I now find that when I'm cycling through the village, I can smell a line of washing at 100 paces because it's so synthetic."

Since summer 2014, Vanessa has had a team to help her: "There are now nine of us working flexible hours, including Margaret, who's 85 and chief lemon cutter – she joins us once a week. We have now expanded into a Dutch barn – having outgrown the old laundry building on the farm where we're based." With hundreds of recipes in Bette's notebooks, Vanessa is working on new products to add to the range. One remedy in particular has proven tricky: "Bette had a recipe for a solution that used whey from fermented raw milk. Very few places sell milk that hasn't been pasteurised these days, but I've found a local farm that does." Vanessa will soon be adding the probiotic cleaner to her range: "The good bacteria in the whey keep working on surfaces to ensure they stay clean."

"It also shows how much Bette was ahead of her time," she continues. "Probiotics are all the rage now and science is backing up her theory that using cleaners to kill off everything could actually be making us ill. Like Bette always said, a little bit of dirt never harmed anyone."

Mangle & Wringer, The Old Laundry, Sydenham Farm, Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire (01451 833600; mangleandwringer.co.uk).

MANGLE & WRINGER



Q&A

VANESSA WILLES, MANGLE & WRINGER

What do you wish you'd known before launching?

How many hours it was possible to work in a week. I think I'd have been kinder to myself and not tried to be all things to all people and asked for help sooner.

Did your feelings about the hobby change when you turned it into a business?

Yes, it can be exhausting trying to earn a living from a hobby. I think it's important to maintain the passion, otherwise the long hours can defeat the object.

Any tips on how to source funding?

We raised £10,000 through crowdfunding. It allowed me to buy equipment, ingredients and materials in larger quantities, but also meant that our investors became customers who shared the journey with us and have been loyal ever since.

Have you made any sacrifices?

My time. Although I love what I do, there are some weeks when I've worked 120 hours. It doesn't leave any time for a social life and my husband and children have to fend for themselves quite often.

How do you compete with larger producers?

We've carved our own niche. Everything we supply is made by hand from traditional cold-processed soap – I think



"STAY TRUE TO YOUR VISION. WE ALWAYS KEEP BETTE'S ETHOS AND PHILOSOPHY AS OUR COMPASS AND NEVER COMPROMISE ON OUR VALUES"

we're unique in that respect. We are familiar with every detail of the process. I source all the ingredients very carefully and know where each one comes from.

Your proudest moment so far?

Receiving the first letter from a customer, which thanked me for helping her husband overcome an unbearable skin sensitivity after a lengthy stay in hospital.

What's the best advice you've been given?

To grow the business slowly. Build deep roots and strong foundations and don't be in a rush to be too big too quickly.

In your opinion, what are the most important features of a successful business?

Staying true to your vision. We always keep Bette's ethos and philosophy as our compass and never compromise on our values.

What have you learned about the industry?

Much of it is dominated by big players who keep the details of the ingredients in their cleaning solutions and laundry powders shrouded in mystery and concealed in trade names. I would like companies to be transparent and disclose fully what's in their products so customers can see for themselves.

Have you made any big adjustments?

Yes, learning to let go and accept that other people are better than me at running certain aspects of my business. I have discovered that it's not possible to grow a company entirely on your own, and finding people with skills to complement yours is vital to success.

Do you have any advice for others just starting out?

Launching a business is very demanding, so surround yourself early on with people who you trust to share the workload – whether they're friends, family or employees.

WORDS FROM THE WISE



Tim Mead, CEO, Yeo Valley

“It’s not just about having time off from work, but more about enjoying the job you do so that you aren’t constantly looking for your next day off. My family have been farming for generations, and producing good-quality sustainable food – not just for now but for the future – is a worthwhile cause. If you can start a business that you love, in an area that you have a passion for and with a mission you believe in, somehow it’s not work anymore, it’s life – and that’s a work-life balance.”

yeovalley.co.uk



SPARE-TIME START-UP

WORKING AROUND EXISTING COMMITMENTS

CREATE ORGANIC
SKINCARE

FACT FILE

NAME Vicki Evans**AGE** 56**LIVES IN** Walk Mill,
Staffordshire**SPECIALISES IN**Natural handmade
skincare products
(01785 280275;
walkmillbotanics.co.uk)**What was the inspiration behind your business?**

Having run my own training consultancy for 21 years, I was looking for a new challenge that incorporated my love of nature. I went on a course in soap-making in 2013 and realised I could do it at home, using ingredients from my garden.

How did you get started? It was a case of trial and error – I made soaps that stained my skin, crumbled and smelt awful – but, by February 2014, I had perfected a recipe, my products were approved by a cosmetic chemist, and I could attend local markets and set up a Facebook page.

Describe a typical working day. I used to get up at 6.30am to make all the soaps – warming together coconut, olive and rapeseed oils and lye, then adding flowers and herbs before pouring the mixture into moulds and leaving it to saponify. I would post orders in the afternoon or prepare for a training course – until recently, I still coached part-time to bring in extra money. However, the business has grown so much that I am in the process of outsourcing production to a social enterprise that employs

ex-offenders, and I can't cultivate all the herbs myself anymore due to demand, so I buy them in. Now, I devote Mondays to marketing Walk Mill Botanics, on Tuesdays I develop soap recipes (I'm currently working on a gardener's range, which will include a cream and possibly a serum, too). Wednesdays and Thursdays are about making sales, while on Fridays I tackle the admin. These days, I find it very helpful to have a structure to the week.

Biggest challenge? Not wasting valuable time by procrastinating. So often in the past, I would mistrust my instincts and attempt to make something work when I knew it wasn't right, usually in a bid to please someone else.

Best thing about running your own business? Being able to include and inspire my two daughters by showing them that women can be successful in business. This year I've been really proud to have won awards from famous entrepreneurs via Twitter and was granted a place on a six-month training programme (entrepreneurial-spark.com) in Birmingham.





TIP Learn how to make both natural soaps and beauty creams, as well as picking up practical tips to launch a business, at Emma Heathcote-James's Little Soap School (littlesoapcompany.co.uk)

ENTERPRISING WAYS TO USE YOUR TIME

10 MINS Be an expert
Demonstrate your passion for organic skincare and build up your credibility as a maker by offering beauty advice, sharing relevant news stories and giving a behind-the-scenes insight into your production methods and how you source your ingredients, all via social media.

30 MINS Do your paperwork
Even if you are only selling products on a small scale, you are still bound by cosmetics legislation (find out more at legislation.gov.uk), and details of each item in your range must be uploaded to Cosmetic Product Safety Reports (cosmeticsafetyassessment.com).

60+ MINS Try different routes to market
To achieve wider awareness of your products, get in touch with beauty bloggers to see if they will review them, approach niche retail outlets and offer free samples that companies can send out with mail orders. The website cosmeticsbusiness.com has a searchable directory of useful contacts.

VICKI'S SPARE-TIME START-UP TIP: don't devote every waking moment to your business – you quickly burn out this way and it isn't productive. Earlier this year, I resolved to take the time to eat healthily and do plenty of exercise – this is having a good effect on my venture, as I feel newly focused.

THE EVENT PLANNERS

TIME TO PARTY

Combining their complementary talents, two women now enjoy running a bespoke event-planning business

WORDS BY EMMA PRITCHARD • PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALUN CALLENDER







"I HAVE TO PINCH MYSELF EVERY DAY
BECAUSE THIS REALLY IS A DREAM JOB"



There's a celebration afoot in Foxton Village Hall, in the Welland Valley in Leicestershire. Pass through its 90-year-old carved-limestone entrance and you'll see tables laid with antique lace doilies, beautiful mismatched chinaware and jam jars filled with seasonal blooms. A smell of freshly baked scones wafts from the kitchen and, overhead, bunting flaps in the summer breeze.

In the middle of the artfully decorated, wood-panelled room, Melanie Adams is casting a critical eye over her surroundings one final time, mentally ticking off her checklist, making sure every detail is correct before her guests arrive. She has good reason to be vigilant – this isn't your average village hall party, it's a wedding reception and there's a newly married couple relying on her to ensure the day goes perfectly. Fortunately as founder of Orange Tree Weddings, and having planned events for dozens of happy customers, she knows just how to create a truly special occasion.

"I have to pinch myself every day because this really is a dream job," says Melanie, who discovered her love of customer service at a young age. "When I turned 14 I started waitressing; later I worked as a receptionist in a doctor's surgery and even in a police station. I always knew that I wanted to work with people." Combining this with a head for figures and a love of spreadsheets, she soon realised event planning was the job for her, but turning this into a reality proved challenging. After completing a degree in management studies, she struggled to find a role that made use of her qualification and so took a bar job in her home town of Loughborough, "as a stop gap". Ten years later, she was still there, having risen to the role of general manager.

AN IN-DEMAND SERVICE

Well-known throughout the Midlands for its retro style and vintage décor, The Orange Tree Group had provided ➔





"LIGHTING IS KEY TO CREATING ATMOSPHERE – WE HAVE
ENDLESS LAMPS AND FAIRY LIGHTS"



Melanie with an outlet for her planning skills. Then in 2009 a couple approached her to ask if they could have their wedding reception in the pub: "It was hard work but everyone involved got a real buzz from it and I couldn't wait to do another." For the next two summers, demand was so high, Melanie was turning couples away. "I realised the only option was to re-create it in other venues," she recalls. Luckily, her employers were supportive and agreed to help her start running the weddings as an offshoot of the business.

USING YOUR CREATIVITY

At today's event, as the first guests arrive, they are greeted with a bag of popcorn and glass of champagne; at other weddings it's been Scotch quail's-egg canapés and ginger juleps. "I borrowed everything from the pub for that first wedding," Melanie says. "The furniture, waiting staff and even the chef. The biggest challenge was dressing the hall."

This is where Melanie's business partner, Jules Beadle, who studied textiles and design, comes into her own. "I'd be lost without her," Melanie says. "I've got the business background and planning skills, but she has the imagination and creative flair." It was, for example, Jules's idea to turn the old horsebox, occasionally used for transporting items, into a quirky photo spot for the bride and groom. "Instead of following the latest trends, we try to do things differently," Jules says.

Back in 2013 the girls organised a few weddings, including Melanie's, and experienced a steep learning curve: "For our first, we ran out of extension leads and toilet roll and had to do a mad dash to the supermarket – now we carry extra." But by 2014, word had spread and with little more promotion than handing out a few flyers, they had 16 weddings lined up, allowing them to focus on the business full time.

"I couldn't believe how quickly it took off," Melanie says. They now have their own website and, as a result of reinvesting any profit, their own vintage styling props and accessories. "It cost around £5,000" 





"THIS JOB FITS IN WELL AROUND CHILDCARE AND OUR HUSBANDS' 9-TO-5 WEEKDAY JOBS"



to set up Orange Tree Weddings," Melanie says. "We have a dedicated team of staff and are separate from the pub group, but were lucky to have their support when we started. It also fits in well around childcare and our husbands' 9-to-5 weekday jobs."

KEEPING ORGANISED

Each event Melanie organises takes around ten full days to prepare, spread over anything from a few months to two years. "Every couple has their own file so I don't get any details mixed up," she says. "The week before can be quite intense. Most of them are on Saturdays, so I spend Monday and Tuesday checking orders and table plans, Wednesday confirming staff and packing lists, Thursday counting crockery and Friday setting up." Recently Melanie invested in a new large van and had it

branded in a paisley design: "It's a great way of advertising as we are constantly driving around the Midlands to venues."

The night is progressing and, having enjoyed one of Melanie's picnic menus of locally sourced pork pies, hams, cheeses and chutneys, plus clotted cream-filled scones served in vintage wicker baskets, the bridal party are getting ready to dance. "Being chosen to help organise someone's special day is an amazing feeling," she says, watching the antics on the dance floor, "and this is one of my favourite parts. Everyone is smiling and happy, and I know that all of our hard work has paid off."

i Orange Tree Weddings (07739 881094; orangetreeweddings.co.uk).
Packages from £6,000. Cake by Green Kitchen Cakes (greenkitchencakes.co.uk).



Q&A

MELANIE ADAMS, ORANGE TREE WEDDINGS

What do you wish you'd known before starting?

People book weddings so far in advance that you often don't see the results of your ideas until years after you've won the booking.

Have you made any sacrifices?

I have a very limited social life in summer. We take our family holiday in April, as I am booked with weddings from May to September. I don't get to relax in front of the TV in the evenings – I have to turn the laptop on.

How do you deal with the pressure of the job?

It is tough being a mother and running a business. You feel constantly torn between being a better parent and a better business manager. That said, with a good support network, it is entirely possible as long as you have a couple of days a week set aside for family time.

What has been your biggest challenge?

Personnel. We used to rely on freelance chefs, due to the seasonal nature of the work, but they are very hard to come by, so we took the plunge and employed one on a permanent contract, which puts our overheads up by a large amount.

Any tips for building the best team?

Offer work experience places and trial staff with the right attitude, ie those who have a genuine enthusiasm for what



"I'M FULL OF PRIDE WHEN I SEE THAT THE BRIDE AND GROOM ARE MADE UP ABOUT THEIR DAY. IT MAKES ME REALISE THAT OUR EFFORTS MEAN SO MUCH"

professional photographs of everything we do. Before and after shots are the best.

What's your proudest moment so far?

I'm full of pride after every wedding when I see that the bride and groom are made up about their day. I realise that our efforts mean so much.

What have you learned about the industry?

I've found out that you receive a lot of business through personal recommendation.

Have you had to make any big adjustments?

In my old job I was used to a large team, now I often work alone, planning and prepping packages – it can get quite solitary. But this is made up for on the event days.

What are the benefits of being based at the kitchen table?

It's great that I don't have to travel to work. I can also get away with working in my pyjamas and no one knows any better. On the other hand, my cat loves to walk on my computer keyboard. Somehow she managed to send an email the other day!

Do you have any advice for others just starting out?

Events require a great deal of loading and unloading, so you must be prepared to get fit. The shifts are also very long and time pressured, so you rarely get a chance to sit.

you do. Make the work fun and they will want to come back.

Are there ways in which you can maximise the time?

I work from home and have to imagine I'm in the office. I schedule planning meetings when there are fewer events and do as much marketing as I can from October to March.

What's the best advice you've been given?

If you make a mistake, don't be too hard on yourself. Learn from it and pick yourself back up.

How do you make your company stand out?

Wedding advertising is very image heavy, so we have good

Organising events

From weddings to big birthdays and anniversaries, there is no shortage of people needing a professional to help ensure their celebration runs smoothly on the day, so planning special occasions is an attractive option for budding entrepreneurs



WORDS BY FIONA DAVIES BUSINESS MANAGER, WOMEN IN RURAL ENTERPRISE (WIREUK.ORG)

BE PREPARED

- One of the most difficult factors for a service business is deciding how much the work is worth and what to charge. Do your finances and make sure that you cover your costs and take payment for your time while remaining competitive.
- Be honest and open from the beginning – make sure customers know exactly what they are getting. A personal event is often an emotional experience, so clarity is important. Offer different options for all budgets as well as various payment structures such as a percentage of total cost, hourly rate or total bespoke package.
- You can't spread yourself too thinly, so be realistic. Resist taking on another job when you know you're already busy – even if the money is tempting. Your reputation is all you have; better to be known for one fantastic event than two mediocre ones.
- Network with and recommend suppliers, from caterers to florists, and they will return the favour.
- If it is weddings you plan to specialise in, bear in



mind that it is a hard market to target; you are either preaching to the converted, in expensive bridal magazines or fairs, or people who are not quite in the market (because they haven't yet been proposed to). Try using low-cost marketing channels such as blogs and social media, telling stories and

NETWORK WITH
AND RECOMMEND
SUPPLIERS AND
THEY WILL RETURN
THE FAVOUR

talking generally about events. This will plant an idea in advance and nudge people towards your service when they are ready.

- Record every minute you spend on a job and divide that by the invoice total; it will help you to quote and ensure you make a profit – your time is the main business asset.

THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

- Whatever the celebration, one size doesn't fit all. Think creatively about themes, venues and tastes. Your marketing should reflect your range, skills and style, and so draw the right customers.
- Keep a database of trusted services: bands, celebrants and child-minders – the devil is in the detail.
- Remember that it's your client's event, not yours; make suggestions and be gracious if your ideas are rejected.
- Be prepared to have your life disrupted in the lead up to a job – achieving perfection is time-consuming.

CREATING A BUZZ

- Hold a mini event fair at your favourite venue, with samples and other trusted suppliers. For weddings,

publish how-to guides; this may seem counter-intuitive, but when brides-to-be realise how much is involved, they will come running to you.

- Make sure your website is beautiful, up to date and has plenty of photos, videos and testimonials so that customers are in no doubt of your credibility and skills.
- Invest time in social media; Instagram will showcase your events in a vintage style and Pinterest will let you create specific boards to which the client can contribute.
- Carry business cards with you at any occasion you have organised, so you're ready to secure bookings from those impressed with your work.

SOURCEBOOK

Eventbrite – *software for event planning and management* (eventbrite.co.uk)

Trello – *website on which you can create action boards for tasks with calendars to help you stay on track* (trello.com)

Wedding Industry Facts and Economics – *a fascinating insight into the trade* (hitched-wife.org)

SEW • COOK • WRITE • DRAW • MAKE • GROW





WHAT'S
next
?

What's next?

By having objectives or an idea of what you want your venture (and life) to look like in the future, you can build an enterprise that you'll love

WORDS BY PAULA HUTCHINGS AND HANNAH MARTIN

So you've followed the steps in this book and now you have a loyal customer base, a tried-and-tested route to market, a sturdy marketing plan, a group of supportive fellow entrepreneurs and a carefully monitored cash flow – so what next? Now is the moment to take stock and decide what you'd like the future of your business to look like.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GOALS

Envisage your business in three years' time. If you don't have objectives or an idea of what you want your venture (and life) to look like in the future, you risk building an enterprise that you don't love and that doesn't meet your needs.

Set clear targets. Focus on measurable factors such as turnover and size, and create a vision for the kind of business you want to grow. How often do you want to work? What aspects do you enjoy and are good at? Be honest with yourself. Don't make big plans for large amounts of growth if that's not what would make you happy. Aiming high is admirable but there are also many small



businesses run by very content entrepreneurs that only produce small amounts of high-quality products for a select customer base.

PLANNING FOR EXPANSION

If you do decide that you would like to grow your business, take time to consider what it means to develop it before forging ahead. A common way many entrepreneurs use to take their business to the next level is relocating to an

office or larger premises. If you are considering this weigh up the pros and cons of moving out. On the plus side, it gives you the space to expand, both physically and psychologically. It also tells the world (and you) that you are serious about your venture and that it has potential. Of course, new premises also come with commitment. You're often tied into a lease, and need to budget for the extra expenses that incur, including rent, furnishings, utilities and insurance. Still unsure about what to do? If you would like advice on this and a variety of other entrepreneurial topics, use the Government's business support helpline (Monday to Friday, 9am-6pm); for details, visit gov.uk/business-support-helpline.

ADDITIONAL HELP

It's not uncommon for fledgling entrepreneurs to wear every hat in their business – from CEO to cleaner. But as your start-up grows, you may need to delegate wisely, either by hiring staff or outsourcing tasks to companies or individuals. It may seem

ENTERPRISING WAYS TO USE YOUR TIME

- 10 MINS** Go onto one of your social media accounts and be proactive – comment on posts, engage in chat, and like and follow influential accounts.
- 30 MINS** Analyse your product sales – most businesses make what they like and promote certain things enthusiastically, but these may not be the bestsellers and customers could be choosing something entirely different. Review your sales figures and buying patterns and determine what people really like – even if it's not your favourite!
- 60+ MINS** Write a quick vision for your business and your life. What do you want to be doing in one year's time? What are you working towards?

*To access a network
of more than 12,500
rated and reviewed
advisers, visit
marketplace.
enterprisenation.com*

a luxury to pay others to take over aspects of your work, but if doing so frees you up to use your true talents and steer your venture forwards, one of the two options will more than pay for itself.

SPREADING THE WORD

Another way to grow is by marketing yourself more extensively to attract new customers, stockists and buyers. Set aside time every month to plan promotional activities, and put them in your diary so they actually happen. Tasks can be as simple as getting out to local networking events, or as ambitious as planning a PR campaign.

Promote yourself. This can feel daunting, so break it into practical, achievable steps. For example, one month you may focus on tackling social media, and spend allotted hours building a presence on your chosen platforms. And the next you might decide to set up newsletters, and work on brainstorming ideas and designs for them. Don't feel shy when it comes to shouting about your products, services and achievements – if your brand and messaging is

right you'll attract the right customers, and they'll be glad they found you. You'll discover plenty of practical PR and marketing advice at talentedladiesclub.com, including how to write a professional press release.

RESILIENCE IS KEY

As many as 50 per cent of start-ups fail in the first two years – while that statistic may seem depressing, there is a great deal you can do to ensure you avoid being part of it.

Longevity doesn't just come from having a brilliant idea, great talent, investment or luck (though all these things certainly help). The truth about many successful businesses is that they're run by persistent, determined people who bounce back from setbacks and overcome tricky problems. Few entrepreneurs triumph straightaway; many work hard behind the scenes for years, and even attempt to launch a few times before they make it big. So don't lose heart if you have a bad day or even month. If you've laid the right foundations for your venture and you stick at it, you will get there in the end.

SEW • COOK • WRITE • DRAW • MAKE • GROW



CASE STUDY: TAKING ON EMPLOYEES

For Martha Keith, founder of Love Give Ink (lovegiveink.com), having a team has transformed her hand-illustrated gifts and stationery company. Now with five employees (and additional contract staff on busy occasions), she advises:

- Be clear on your vision. Ask yourself what you can delegate. What do you do best – what is the thing you do that moves your enterprise forward? To expand, focus on where you have the most passion and enlist others to help with the remaining tasks that are needed to keep the business going.
- Start small. This could mean taking on someone part-time or just one employee to start with.
- Have patience. It won't always be easy. Once you have employees, you need to invest a lot of time to manage and train them. But one day you'll find there are things happening in your business that don't require you at all, which will make it all worthwhile.

THE GINGERBREAD BAKER

A TASTE FOR TRADITION

Stumbling upon a gingerbread recipe in an old cookery book was the start of a new chapter for Liz Druce, who now makes this decorative festive fare for a living

WORDS BY KATE LANGRISH • PHOTOGRAPHS BY LISA LINDER





In the converted pantry of a Georgian farmhouse in the tiny North Yorkshire hamlet of Egton Grange, the warm and comforting aroma of ginger and spice wafts across the courtyard to the old stable blocks and milking parlour. Follow your nose and, through the window, Liz Druce, founder of The Gingerbread House, can be spied taking down jars of flour, ground ginger ("I add quite a lot. I think gingerbread should taste of ginger"), mixed spice and caster sugar. This will all be blended together with golden syrup, black treacle and eggs from the 30 hens that roam her four-acre plot to make a fragrant dough.

This is the beginning of just one of the 5,000 gingerbread house kits and 2,000 gingerbread men that she sends out every festive season: "From September onwards, it's heads down in the bakery. From November, I work 14-hour days to produce about 100 small kits and 30 large kits daily. Each one is mixed, baked and cut by hand." Watching Liz deftly mixing ingredients, it's hard to believe that baking hasn't been her life-long profession. In fact, it didn't become her full-time business until eight years ➡





ago. Originally trained in fine art at Loughborough University, she developed a passion for gardening during a gap year, then embarked on a 20-year career in horticulture. But eventually, after years of long, cold northern winters working outside, Liz felt the need to make a change. "I think one of the reasons I loved baking so much was because it meant I was near the warmth of an oven!" she says. Stumbling upon a gingerbread recipe in an old cookery book she found in a junk shop inspired her to try her hand at the festive fare. "I decided to make it as Christmas presents. It took a few attempts to get it just right, but I loved working with it. My mother is a ceramicist, so I've made things from clay since childhood. Gingerbread is warm, sculptural and you can eat it – what more can you ask for?"

TAKING THE PLUNGE

It was Christmas 2003 when her husband Stephen, a fellow gardener based at the stately home Castle Howard, took a set of her gingerbread houses into work as a treat for colleagues. "They asked me to produce some to sell in the shop," Liz recalls. "At the same time, another

friend commissioned me to make a replica of the pub she was working at." This gave her the confidence to approach farm shops and cafés with her gingerbread house kits. The business developed gradually alongside the gardening, but after four years she took the plunge and went full-time.

Back in the pantry Liz is unwrapping some dough she made earlier in the week. "I leave it for a couple of days to mature as it's too soft to work with straightaway," she explains. "I used to roll it by hand but it's important the pieces are all the same thickness and fit together well, so two years ago I bought a commercial pizza-dough roller, which is quicker

"I THINK ONE OF THE REASONS I LOVED BAKING SO MUCH WAS BECAUSE IT MEANT I WAS NEAR THE WARMTH OF AN OVEN!"

and more precise." The biscuits are then baked in a professional catering oven at 180°C. Liz still creates every single section of each house and all the gingerbread men by hand, but for the past two years she's had an assistant, Sarah, who lives locally, to help package up the kits during the busy run-up to Christmas. Such is the popularity of gingerbread houses that these days you can pick up one in most supermarkets – but they won't be like Liz's. Hers even have stained-glass windows: "I cut out a section on a wall and pop in a boiled sweet, which melts when it's baked."

Hanging from the walls, the handles of the copper cutters are rubbed bright through use. Gingerbread men dangle next to reindeer and snowflakes, but there are also chicks, rabbits, hearts and even seagulls. Gingerbread is a year-round business for Liz and seasonal kits are sold around Valentine's Day and Easter, while bespoke biscuits are made for wedding favours and parties.

Always on the lookout for ways to innovate, Liz has added several extra strands to the business over the years: "I branched out into children's parties ➡



DECORATING ONE OF LIZ'S
GINGERBREAD HOUSES IS
BECOMING AN ANNUAL
FESTIVE EVENT IN
MANY HOMES







where each child would decorate a house, but I soon realised the adults wanted to get involved just as much." Each summer she and Stephen also pack up 'Bella', their cherry-red 1971 VW campervan, and create a pop-up tearoom at festivals.

FOLLOWING A TRADITION

Liz is delighted the European custom of decorating gingerbread houses for Christmas is gaining popularity here, but points out that the baked treat has its own history in Britain, too. "Elizabeth I used to give shaped pieces to important guests, and it has long been sold as 'fairings' in markets," she explains. Her version is also very different to the *lebkuchen* found in Germany, where the tradition of houses made of gingerbread is thought to have started back in the 1800s.

Decorating one of Liz's gingerbread houses is becoming an annual festive event in many homes: "Lots of families

"I BRANCHED OUT INTO CHILDREN'S PARTIES, BUT SOON REALISED THAT THE ADULTS WANTED TO GET INVOLVED JUST AS MUCH"



now place an order year after year. They send me pictures of the end result – I love seeing how people have made them their own." Of course, Liz's own farmhouse is also adorned with edible delights at this time of year. "When we moved in, we had the worst winter for 20 years. We were completely snowed in but it was my busiest time and I needed to get the orders out. We had to strap boxes to our chests and backs before wading through a mile of snowdrifts to reach the post office," she says. "We couldn't even get a Christmas tree, so we cut down a large holly branch from our hedgerow and hung decorations on it, including home-baked gingerbread men, of course. Now this has become a tradition of our own."

i Order a gingerbread house kit (large £17.50; small £6.95) at theqbhouse.co.uk.



Q&A

LIZ DRUCE, THE GINGERBREAD HOUSE

How do you ensure your work is still enjoyable?

I regularly reassess what I do and how I do it, continually adapting and changing to make work interesting and pleasurable.

Did yours seem like a realistic business idea when you first thought of it?

No, I still feel very fortunate to be able to earn a living doing something I love.

What has been your biggest challenge?

Not letting the business take over my life with my family. I contain the work areas and don't let them flow into the rest of the house.

What's the greatest advice you've been given?

Don't be afraid to use machinery. For example, for years I hand-rolled all the gingerbread; now I have a machine that has sped up the process.

How do you compete with larger businesses?

I don't – my products are all handmade, not mass produced. Even my packaging is very 'home spun' instead of glossy and commercial looking. In a similar way, I try to make my company stand out with personal touches: I talk to people about the products and often do a little bit extra, which always seems to be appreciated.



"I REALLY ENJOY
THE COMBINATION
OF BEING AT HOME
BAKING AND
THEN MEETING
CUSTOMERS"

What's your proudest moment so far?

Being featured in *Country Living*. There is something very uplifting about having your creations appear in a magazine.

The best thing about running your own business?

I really enjoy the combination of being at home bakings and then meeting customers at events or via my website.

What has surprised you along the way?

The manner in which the business has changed. I set out making gingerbread for the wholesale market, selling to farm shops, delis and hotels. Now I produce cakes, puddings and pasties as well as the gingerbread and only supply customers direct.

Have you learnt anything about the industry since starting?

Yes, there is so much competition in the food industry, so to stay buoyant you really need to keep positive about your objectives and don't be afraid to adapt and change what you do.

What are your plans for the future?

I want to run gingerbread workshops from home. I am now in the process of renovating one of the barns to accommodate a dedicated area.

Any advantages of being based at the kitchen table?

Living on a smallholding, there is always something to do – we grow our own fruit and vegetables, and have bees and chickens, so being at home really fits in well with that. On the other hand, you can never really get away from your work...

What is the best decision you've made?

Moving to a larger house that had room for the business.

What advice would you give to others just starting out?

That the work will gradually build up over time – it's also wise to test the market by working part-time in the business and continue to work part-time in an existing job if you have one.

WORDS FROM THE WISE



Anna Rigby, head of buying, home accessories, gifts and seasonal, John Lewis

“Once you’ve been running your business successfully for a sustained period, resolved any problems and perhaps built some resilience if you’ve had some ups and downs, you may consider expanding and will want to approach some bigger outlets with your products or services. My advice is to be really confident that you can make that next step to meet the requirements of larger companies. Try to seek support from an independent mentor or organisations such as the Prince’s Trust, Enterprise Nation or Virgin Startup, as friends and family aren’t always as honest as they need to be in order to be really helpful. Believe in yourself, ask for, listen to and act on advice and you’ll be a success!” *johnlewis.com*

SPARE-TIME START-UP

WORKING AROUND EXISTING COMMITMENTS

LEAD WILDLIFE
WALKS

FACT FILE

NAME Julia Horton-Powdrill**AGE** 67**LIVES IN** St Davids, Pembrokeshire**SPECIALISES IN**Wild food and foraging courses
(01437 721035; wildaboutpembrokeshire.co.uk)**WALKING ALONG HEDGEROW-**

lined lanes and over rocky beaches with views of the surrounding Pembrokeshire countryside, Julia Horton-Powdrill is out and about come rain or shine. But chances are she won't be alone. As well as enjoying all the wildlife that her home county has to offer, she leads foraging workshops to share it with individuals, families and anyone who is keen to find out more about nature.

"I used to provide country-house accommodation and have always loved picking blackberries, nettles and seaweed," Julia says. "Now I take other people on my rambles and teach them about gathering free food. I have also organised the Really Wild Food & Countryside Festival for 12 years and, more recently, started the annual St David's Seaweed Week, which celebrates the plant's health benefits and

uses in food and cosmetics." Julia has been recognised for her efforts, which contribute to the local economy, in accolades including the Countryside Alliance Tourism Award for Wales this year: "I'd like to grow the Seaweed Week, giving more people the chance to love seaweed in all its forms." Such is Julia's enthusiasm that she has appeared on BBC's *The One Show* in a bath full of the marine algae.

When she first launched her business, Julia took out public liability insurance and then advertised her services with fliers and a branded Land Rover. Within a couple of months, she was regularly leading weekly groups of up to ten. "I now run workshops in coastal foraging and make soaps incorporating wild ingredients," she says. "Earning a living from walks in the countryside – what could be better than that?"



ENTERPRISING WAYS TO USE YOUR TIME

10 MINS **Prepare the ground** Create interest in local flora and fauna by asking your social-media followers to share what they can see from their window each week. Hopefully, this will encourage them to venture outside and learn more on one of your guided walks.

30 MINS **Play it safe** Public liability insurance will be essential when taking groups for walks in the countryside. Find out more at abi.org.uk. It may also

be beneficial to create guidelines on health and safety and appropriate behaviour to give to future customers.

60+ MINS **Collaborate** You'll need to differentiate your walks from the many free ones available: maybe theme them around local points of interest, combine a dawn chorus ramble with breakfast at an independent café, or engage with youth groups to introduce wildlife to the next generation.

TIP Local tourist boards and community organisations often provide grants and free training to support independent enterprises in the area. Contact your nearest office to see what it can offer you.

JULIA'S SPARE-TIME START-UP TIP: do something you love and always love what you do. If people see the passion and delight you get from your business and your products, then you are halfway there.



THE SOAP MAKER

MADE FROM NATURE

Based at her Welsh smallholding, Carol Allen has built a business using the milk from her goats as the key ingredient in a range of bath products fragranced with freshly picked flowers and local honey

WORDS BY **KATE LANGRISH** • PHOTOGRAPHS BY **RACHEL WARNE**



Carol Allen opens the door to the summerhouse, where her stock of Llanvalley handmade soap is kept, and starts to load up her car for the market the next morning. A warm, subtle aroma wafts into the evening air, the result of the natural ingredients that Carol uses, most notably, perhaps, the fresh milk provided by the five goats that are watching her over the fence.

For someone who is now so passionate about skincare, it's perhaps surprising that Carol has no background in the subject. Formerly an Art, Design and Technology teacher, she only started keeping goats to help clear the five-acre grounds of her home near Llangollen, Denbighshire. "When we moved in, the land was overgrown with brambles and dock, so my dad suggested getting the animals to munch their way through the weeds. Local goatkeepers called Pat and Godfrey sold me three Saanens and taught me how to milk them," she says.

Despite her family and friends eating all the yogurt and cheese she could produce, Carol still had a surplus of milk. Then an accident while handling one of her horses dislocated her elbow and left her unable to teach practical classes. "I couldn't face the thought of a desk job, so I began to think what else I could do," Carol explains. "It was actually Godfrey who suggested making soap. He even dug out a recipe his grandmother had used."

A PROCESS OF EXPERIMENTATION


With a combination of books, internet research and YouTube videos, Carol taught herself the traditional cold process. "It took around six months of experimenting before I devised a recipe I was happy with," she says. "I felt like a mad professor all suited up with goggles and gloves in my kitchen!"

Her first product, a plain goats' milk soap, proved so popular ("My husband and son both have eczema, and this soap really eased the itching") that she tested the water further afield with a stall at a local farmers' market. "I got fantastic



feedback and now sell at five events every month," Carol says. "I started a business account with £600 of savings in 2011 and was delighted to be banking around £50 a month in my first year. That has now increased to £700 a month – a lot less than teaching, but it's not just about the money. It's wonderful to be creating something that makes people so happy." Now she makes a batch of soap most

days. To the daily yield of milk from Rosie – one of five current goats, along with Daphne, Wennol, Eira and Billy – she combines Welsh spring water and sodium hydroxide to make an alkaline 'lye' in a bucket, while heating olive and coconut oils in a pan on the hob. Soap is created when these elements are combined and the chemical reaction saponification takes place. "You need ➡

A white goat with a green collar is looking over a wooden fence. The goat's mouth is slightly open, and it appears to be chewing. The background is a lush green field with trees and foliage. The text "MY DAD SUGGESTED GETTING THE ANIMALS TO MUNCH THEIR WAY THROUGH THE WEEDS" is overlaid on the right side of the image.

"MY DAD SUGGESTED
GETTING THE ANIMALS
TO MUNCH THEIR WAY
THROUGH THE WEEDS"



to stir the mixture continuously until it starts to thicken or you'll be left with a soap that separates, is too crumbly or too alkaline," Carol says.

KEEPING IT LOCAL

It's at this point that she adds her other ingredients, including honey ("naturally antibacterial") from a local beekeeper; Cheshire oats ("alleviate itching"); and dried lavender, sage and borage ("very soothing") from her garden. She then pours the liquid into moulds and leaves them in a chest of drawers in her stone-floored washhouse to start the curing process. After two days, Carol cuts the solidified blocks with a sharp knife at

her kitchen table – larger bars for family use, and small pieces for guest soaps that she sells to local B&Bs, including Geufron Hall, a local country house B&B. Then, laid out on trays, dated and labelled with a batch number, she transfers them to the summerhouse to cure for at least six more weeks. "I'm required by law to keep a record of everything I make," Carol explains. "I also had to have my ingredients and method checked by a government-approved chemist in order to comply with Cosmetic Products (Safety) Regulations."

The soaps are finished with a simple label ("my design background still comes in handy") or a pressed flower collected on one of the walks she takes beneath the spectacular Pontcysyllte Aqueduct: "I love taking inspiration from my surroundings for the soaps and balms I now make."

Since starting the business, Carol and her husband have moved to an old stone cottage, high on the hillside on the other side of the valley, after buying the property from the beekeeper who used to provide honey and capping wax for her soaps and balms. "The goats thrive on the steep pasture and small woodland and the views from the house are stunning and inspirational to my business."

i To order Carol's products or for events that she will be attending, visit llanvalley.co.uk.

"MY SURROUNDINGS
PROVIDE A LOT OF
INSPIRATION
FOR MY SOAPS"



Q&A

CAROL ALLEN, LLANVALLEY NATURAL PRODUCTS

Were your feelings about your hobby altered when you turned it into a business?

Yes, they changed from self-indulgence to self-worth.

What was the best decision you made?

To take my hobby a step further. I enrolled on a local government-run Start Your Own Business course to find out whether my ideas would be feasible and profitable. The advice I received, and meeting the other attendees, inspired and gave me the confidence to hatch my plan.

Does being based at the kitchen table present any challenges?

It's hard to convince the rest of the family that although you're at home you are actually working.

What was the worst decision you made?

I soon discovered that it's a mistake to run before you can walk. I booked quite a few big expensive events before my business was properly established. This turned out to be costly, stressful and unprofitable.

The most useful lesson you have had along the way?

To stand by my original ethos and unique selling point – it's what attracted my customers in the first place and it's what



"IT'S A MISTAKE TO RUN BEFORE YOU CAN WALK – I BOOKED A FEW BIG EVENTS BEFORE MY BUSINESS WAS PROPERLY ESTABLISHED, WHICH WAS COSTLY AND STRESSFUL"

will keep them coming back. No cutting corners, no aspirations to go bigger at the expense of losing quality in both my product and customer service. That is my competitive tool.

Have you made any big adjustments?

Yes, working weekends and holidays (on my stall at events and shows) when family and friends aren't.

What does success mean to you?

Enjoying my business so much that it never becomes a chore. I am living for my

work instead of working for my living.

Would you do anything differently?

Yes, I'd pace my workload more realistically by trying not to sell more than I can make, and always have enough stock to cope with unexpected demands.

What's the best advice you've been given?

To make good use of social media to promote Llanvalley.

Any plans for the future?

The smallholding has been nurtured organically for many years, and the cottage has a beautiful garden full of flowers and herbs. I plan to use as many home-grown ingredients as possible in my products and look into the possibility of distilling my own essential oils and applying for organic status. Now I also keep a rare Welsh breed of sheep called Llanwenog. Perhaps I will turn my other hobby of making textiles into a 'sister business' by using their fleece to produce some organic knitwear.

What advice would you give to others just starting out?

Satisfy yourself that you have a viable product or service, test the market for it and take all the advice and help on offer to turn your business idea into a reality.

Working in beauty

What could be a more romantic way to earn a living than harnessing natural ingredients in soaps, lotions and potions? Make and sell such products and you will be joining more than one million other people working in the UK beauty industry, which is worth £17 billion



WORDS BY FIONA DAVIES BUSINESS MANAGER, WOMEN IN RURAL ENTERPRISE (WIREUK.ORG)

PERFECTING THE PRODUCT

- Take time to experiment with ingredients and techniques. Keep a log of what methods work well or need modification, or which essential oil blends you have tried, for example. Consider attending appropriate courses to learn more.

- Once you are no longer simply giving friends and family homemade lotions and potions, and actually selling your goods – no matter on how small a scale – they must comply with cosmetic legislation (health and safety regulations, in particular), and labelling laws. You are bound by the Cosmetic Products (Safety) Regulations (legislation.gov.uk); details of items must be uploaded on the Cosmetic Products Notification Portal (search 'Cosmetic Products Notification Portal' at ec.europa.eu). Your products should also be tested and approved by a certified assessor (contact your local Trading Standards office).

- Spend time working on the packaging. Look for recycled, biodegradable options from sustainable sources. Remember that



your ingredients must be clearly printed, and listed in the International Nomenclature of Cosmetic Ingredients directory.

FIND AN APPROPRIATE MARKET

- Your artisan-made items will probably be more expensive than those that are mass-produced, so target shops and fairs where people are likely to be looking for gifts and treats.

TARGET SHOPS AND
FAIRS WHERE
PEOPLE ARE LIKELY
TO BE LOOKING FOR
GIFTS AND TREATS

- If you would prefer to sell directly to customers, wedding favours, corporate gifts and boutique hotels may be worth researching.

- Have you used mostly natural or organic ingredients in your range? Or are you knowledgeable or qualified in an area such as aromatherapy? If so, do as much as you can to promote this fact – it's another plus point with which to market your products.

- Engage with your customers online. Use social media channels to 'converse' with potential purchasers. Offer advice for problem skin (you could advertise a Tweet Chat on Twitter about the topic), talk about your collection and share images of the making process (while taking care not to reveal any trade secrets that the competition could glean).

GROW AND FLOURISH

- When you feel you are up and running, attend industry shows such as Organic & Natural at ExCel, London (organicandnaturalbeauty.co.uk), aimed at beauty businesses ready to expand.

- Think about all the small companies in your area – are there any that could supply

you with entrepreneurial expertise, complementary ingredients, services or equipment? Not only is it good for your venture and the local economy if you trade with enterprises near you, but it could also create a story around your brand to tell customers and stockists. Consider using this on everything from packaging and press releases to social media and awards entries. If you aren't familiar with other businesses in your area, why not try networking through an organisation such as WiRE (wire.org.uk)?

SOURCEBOOK

The Cosmetic, Toiletry and Perfumery Association – membership organisation representing the UK industry (ctpa.org.uk).

Guild of Craft Soap & Toiletry Makers – a support network that provides information and guidelines on making soap by hand (gcstm.co.uk)

Quintessentially English – Wiltshire-based business offering workshops teaching others the art of soap-making (quintessentially-english.co.uk)

Directory

Here is CL's guide to the organisations, government departments and other useful websites that will help you launch your business

WORDS BY FIONA DAVIES

Assistance for fledgling enterprises

RULES AND REGULATIONS

- **A complete guide** (gov.uk/starting-up-a-business/set-up-your-business)
- **Becoming a sole trader or limited company** (gov.uk/business-legal-structures)
- **Business plan templates** (gov.uk/write-business-plan)
- **Find out whether or not you require a licence** (gov.uk/licence-finder/sectors)
- **Government grant finder – national search of all grant and finance schemes** (gov.uk/business-finance-support-finder)
- **Companies House** – for setting up a limited company (gov.uk/government/organisations/companies-house)
- **British Insurance Brokers' Association** – guide and jargon-buster for all insurance (biba.org.uk/find-insurance/jargon-buster)
- **Chartered Trading Standards Institute** – training and online advice in consumer protection and compliance (tradingstandards.uk)
- **Government Business Support** – access assistance and advice on starting your own enterprise through a dedicated helpline and website, which is backed by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (0300 456 3565; gov.uk/business-finance-support-finder)



INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY (IP)

Advice on copyright, patents and how to protect your brand:

- **British Library Business & IP Centre** (bl.uk/bipc)
- **Intellectual Property Office** (gov.uk/government/organisations/intellectual-property-office)
- **Naminum** – name-generator company (naminum.com)
- **Own it** (own-it.org)
- **Start-up Donut** – a wide range of resources useful for launching an enterprise, including help with pricing products (startupdonut.co.uk)

WEBSITE AND DATA RULES

- **Information Commissioner's Office** – data privacy and holding

information (ico.org.uk/for-organisations)

- **Nominet** – buying a website name (nominet.uk)
- **UKWDA** (The UK Web Design Association) – regulations (ukwda.org/blog/is-your-website-legal)

BUILD YOUR OWN WEBSITE

- **Moonfruit** – template-based website platform (moonfruit.com)
- **Shopify** – shop-based website platform to sell online (shopify.co.uk)
- **Squarespace** – template-based website platform (squarespace.com)
- **Wix** – free cloud-based web development platform using simple drag and drop tools (wix.com)

● **Wordpress** – simple blog-based web platform, which can be upgraded with plug-ins for scalable websites (free version is wordpress.com; professional is wordpress.org)

ONLINE MARKETPLACES

- **All by Mama** – a collection of items made by entrepreneurial mothers (allbymama.com)
- **Amazon** – vast and wide-ranging goods from myriad companies (amazon.com)
- **Ebay** – auction site selling new and second-hand products (ebay.co.uk)
- **Etsy** – showcases vintage and handmade items (etsy.com/uk)
- **Folksy** – craft specialist selling the work of more than 5,000 British designers and makers (folksy.com)
- **Not on the High Street** – supports artisan companies producing original gifts (notonthehighstreet.com)

OUTSOURCING

- **Freelancer** – post a description of your project and attract bids from people available for hire (freelancer.co.uk)
- **PeoplePerHour** – a freelance ‘community of talent’ (peopleperhour.com)
- **Upwork** – offers all kind of professionals, from accountants to web designers (upwork.com)

NETWORKING AND ONGOING SUPPORT

- **Association of Business Mentors** – trade body for the UK and Ireland (associationofbusinessmentors.org)
- **The Athena Network** – international networking, training and development business club (theathenanetwork.co.uk)
- **BNI** – a global network boasting a unique referral system (bni.co.uk)



- **Business is Great** – Government support, advice and inspiration for growing a successful business (greatbusiness.gov.uk)
- **Enterprise Nation** – workshops and online support for start-ups (enterprisenation.com)
- **Fabulous Women** – inspiration, learning and support (fabulous-women.co.uk)
- **Federation of Small Business** – professional services and support (fsb.org.uk)
- **Growth Hubs** – Local Enterprise Partnerships initiative to join up national and local support that can provide business help (lepnetwork.net/growth-hubs)
- **Marketing Donut** – comprehensive online marketing

- support and articles for small businesses (marketingdonut.co.uk)
- **Mentors Me** – online gateway for businesses who are looking for mentors (mentorsme.co.uk)
- **UK Jelly** – informal co-working events (uk-jelly.org.uk)
- **Women in Rural Enterprise (WiRE)** – networking groups, business advice and support, plus workshops and events (wireuk.org)

CO-WORKING

Fairly new option outside London for shared-space working – try your local Growth Hub (see left), HubbleHQ (hubblehq.com) or ShareDesk (sharedesk.net) or Google ‘co-working’ in your area ➔

Technology for home working

FREE CLOUD STORAGE

- **Dropbox** allows 2GB (dropbox.com)
- **Google Drive** gives you 15GB (drive.google.com)
- **iCloud** for Apple users – offers 5GB (icloud.com)
- **OneDrive** is Microsoft's Cloud with 15GB (onedrive.live.com)

INTERNET PROVISION

- **Broadband speed checker** (broadbandspeedchecker.co.uk)
- **Superfast Broadband Availability** (gosuperfastchecker.culture.gov.uk)

MANAGING AND ANALYSING SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVITY

- **Google Analytics** – monitor your website traffic and activity (google.co.uk/analytics)
- **Hootsuite** – schedule posts in advance with this tool (hootsuite.com)
- **Idealware** – guide to assessing impact (idealware.org/articles/measuring-your-social-media-success)

OTHER USEFUL SITES

- **Canva** – overlay your own images with text for use in social media (canva.com)
- **Capsule** – database to store and manage customer and supplier data (capsulecrm.com)
- **Doodle** – easy organisation of meetings, so no more emailing backwards and forwards (doodle.com)
- **Evernote** – note-taking and storage app, which allows you to share, collaborate and chat with colleagues (evernote.com)
- **Last Pass** – safe and secure storage of logins and passwords in an encrypted form (lastpass.com)

● **MailChimp** – send newsletter and marketing emails to up to 2,000 subscribers for free (mailchimp.com)

● **Sunrise** – calendar app that gathers information from all calendars and social accounts and presents it all together (calendar.sunrise.am)

Areas of business

BEAUTY AND COSMETICS

Cosmetic, Toiletry and Perfumery Association (CTPA) – representing companies involved in making, supplying and selling cosmetic and personal care products (ctpa.org.uk)

● **Cosmetic Safety Assessors (CSA)** – resources for manufacturers of cosmetic products to help find an appropriate safety assessor (csa-cosmeticsafetyassessors.weebly.com)

● **Guild of Craft Soap & Toiletry Makers** – membership support group providing information and guidelines (gcstm.co.uk)

● **Herb & Hedgerow** – UK blog for people involved with natural and organic skincare (herbhedgerow.co.uk)

● **School of Natural Skincare** – online courses and support

for beauty businesses (schoolofnaturalskincare.com)

CRAFT, FASHION AND DESIGN

● **Crafts Council** – information about exhibitions, events and competitions (craftscouncil.org.uk)

● **Craft Fairs UK** – national arts and crafts fair community with events and resources (ukcraftfairs.com)

● **Craft & Hobby Association UK** – trade body representing the needs of UK-based craft industry retailers, buyers and suppliers (cha-uk.co.uk)

● **The Design Trust** – practical, honest, inspirational, expert training and support for entrepreneurial creatives (thedesigntrust.co.uk)

● **Image by Design Licensing** – commercial licensing agency supplying art, illustration and photography to all industries (ibd-licensing.co.uk)

● **Let's Make it Here** – database for designers, brands and retailers for sourcing UK manufacturing, design and fabrics (letsmakeithere.org)

● **UK Handmade** – online magazine showcasing and promoting the best creative talent (ukhandmade.co.uk)





FOOD AND DRINK

- **Big Barn** – food-and-drink-related news, plus an online directory of British producers, farmers' markets and independent retailers (bigbarn.co.uk)
- **Food and Drink Federation** – events, training and useful advice (fdf.org.uk)
- **Food Standards Agency** – definitive guidance and support on food hygiene, and workplace and product safety certification (food.gov.uk)
- **Nationwide Caterers Association** – trade body with resources and support for food businesses around the country (ncass.org.uk)
- **The Soil Association** – technical advice and support for organic producers (soilassociation.org)
- **The School of Artisan Food** – wide range of food and business courses taught by experienced craft producers (schoolofartisanfood.org)
- **Streetfood** – guides, support and directory listing for outdoors catering (streetfood.org.uk)

GARDENING, FLORISTRY AND OUTDOORS

- **British Florist Association** – workshops, competitions and

networking opportunities (britishfloristassociation.org)

- **Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs** – news and contacts for the environment and countryside (gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs)
- **Institute for Outdoor Learning** – supports those who use the outdoors to make a difference for others, and includes training, support and accreditation (outdoor-learning.org)
- **Nature Net** – UK independent countryside and conservation website (naturenet.net)
- **Outdoor Industries Association** – trade body for organisations that provide products and services for outdoor leisure pursuits (outdoorindustriesassociation.co.uk)
- **Royal Horticultural Society** – courses, advice and gardening publications (rhs.org.uk)
- **Smallholder Magazine** – news, network and information for small-scale producers (smallholder.co.uk)

OPENING A SHOP

- **British Independent Retailers Association** – trade body providing support and services (bira.co.uk)
- **National Market Traders Federation** – national body for

market and street traders, resources and training for retailers (nmtf.co.uk)

- **Planning Portal** – government guide to planning permission and change of use for business (planningportal.gov.uk)
- **Rural Shops Alliance** – support for owners of independent rural shops (ruralshops.org.uk)
- **Small Business Saturday** – celebration of unique local businesses across the UK (smallbusinesssaturdayuk.com)

Legalities:

- **Sale and Supply of Goods Act** – government guide to rules that retailers and sellers must abide by (legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1994/35/contents)
- **Health and Safety Executive** – information about these issues in the workplace (hse.gov.uk)

TOURISM AND ACCOMMODATION

- **Bed and Breakfast Association** – UK trade body for B&Bs and guest houses (bandbassociation.org)
- **Quality in Tourism** – regulatory and assessment body for the accommodation and tourism industry (qualityintourism.com)
- **Start a Bed & Breakfast** – features, blogs and practical advice for new ventures (startabedandbreakfast.co.uk)
- **Tourism Alliance** – industry trade body with support and news (tourismalliance.com)
- **Tourism Business Survey** – review and key trends for businesses in the tourism and leisure industries (tourismsurveys.co.uk)
- **Tripadvisor** – how to get the best out of the Tripadvisor travel rating website for your business, plus news and tourism resources (tripadvisor.co.uk/Owners)
- **Visit Britain** – promoting Britain as a tourist destination worldwide (visitbritain.org)

COUNTRY LIVING'S BUILD-A-BUSINESS COURSES

– be the first to book!

Dreaming of turning your hobby into a business? Or growing an existing enterprise? We can help. Come to our Build-a-Business days, where you will receive expert advice and insider tips, plus the chance to network with other small businesses

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID COTTER

ALL GUESTS
GET ENTRY
TO A PRIZE DRAW
AND A CL
GOODY BAG!

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CHOOSE FROM OUR RANGE OF INSPIRING COURSES

1 BUILD-A-BUSINESS DAY

A day of talks and workshops, which are perfect for those who are thinking of launching a business or have recently done so and are looking to grow. These days will cover:

- **'WHY THERE'S NEVER BEEN A BETTER TIME TO START YOUR OWN BUSINESS'** Fiona Davies, business manager from WiRE, offers advice for taking the first steps.
- **'DEFINING YOUR BRAND & BUSINESS PLANNING'** Identify your USP and write a simple strategy to develop your business.
- **'HOW TO GET YOUR PRODUCT INTO COUNTRY LIVING'** Learn insider tips on how to get editorial coverage and have the chance to pitch to our magazine editors.
- **'DE-MYSTIFYING SOCIAL MEDIA'** How to use social media to expand your customer base.
- **'WE DID IT! TIPS FROM KITCHEN TABLE TALENT BUSINESSES'** Business owners previously featured in CL share their experiences and offer advice.
- **'HAVE THE CONFIDENCE TO MAKE THE LEAP'** CL editor-in-chief Susy Smith shares her insight.



“The networking was amazing”
“A really positive and practical day,
which was so inspiring”*

2 HOW TO REALLY MAKE MONEY

This one-off day is aimed at entrepreneurs who are already in business but are looking for ways to make their venture truly profitable. What could be better than doing what you love and making good money from it? We'll show you how with advice on cash flow, funding, licensing, pitching to retailers, negotiation skills and writing a business plan.

3 DE-MYSTIFYING SOCIAL MEDIA

We take the fear factor out of social media and show how to harness its power to take your business to the next level. Our team will guide you through the key platforms and get you started. You'll develop a realistic strategy, write effective posts, set up a business Facebook page and learn how to use apps to enhance your posts.

4 MARKET YOURSELF FOR LESS THAN £5!

This day will give you all the tools you need to get your business noticed without breaking the bank. Expand your customer base with inspiring low-cost ideas; you'll write a marketing strategy, and receive advice on product images, exhibiting and attracting essential media coverage, with invaluable tips from magazine and website editors.



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For enquiries, email hearstevents@hearst.co.uk



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